

A

11. 8. 2

LETTER

To the Reverend

D^r. Conyers Middleton,

Occasioned by his late

FREE ENQUIRY.



12 La

L O N D O N,

Printed, and Sold by G. WOODFALL, near *Charing-Cross*, A. DODD, at the *Peacock* in the *Strand*, J. ROBINSON, *Ludgate-Street*, T. TRYE, near *Grey's Inn*, and THO. JAMES under the *Royal-Exchange*.

MDCCXLIX.

[Price Three Shillings.]

5



A

LETTER

To the Reverend

Dr. *Conyers Middleton,*

Occasioned by his late

FREE ENQUIRY, etc.

January 4, 1748-9.

REVEREND SIR,

I. IN your late *Enquiry*, you endeavour to prove, First, That there were no miracles wrought in the primitive church; Secondly, That all the primitive fathers were fools or knaves, and most of them both one and the other. And it is easy to observe, the whole tenor of your argument tends to prove, Thirdly, That no miracles were wrought by Christ

A 2 or

or his apostles; and Fourthly, That these too were fools or knaves, or both.

2. I am not agreed with you on any of these heads. My reasons I shall lay before you, in as free a manner (though not in so smooth or labour'd language) as you have laid yours before the world.

3. But I have neither inclination nor leisure to follow you, step by step, through three hundred and seventy three quarto pages. I shall therefore set aside all I find in your work, which does not touch the merits of the cause: And likewise contract the question itself, to the three first centuries. For I have no more to do with the writers or miracles of the fourth, than with those of the fourteenth century.

4. You will naturally ask, "why do you stop there? What reason can you

you give for this? If you allow miracles before the empire became Christian, why not afterwards too?" I answer, because *after the empire became Christian* (they are your own words) *a general corruption both of faith and morals, infected the Christian church*: *Which by that revolution, as St. Jerom says, "lost as much of her virtue, as it had gained of wealth and power".*^{*} And this very reason St. Chrysostom himself gave in the words you have afterward cited: "There are some who ask, *Why are not miracles performed still? Why are there no persons who raise the dead and cure diseases?*" To which he replies, "That it was owing to the want of faith and virtue and piety in those times."

1. You begin your *preface* by observing *That the Enquiry was intend-*

* p. 123. Dr. Middleton's words are generally printed in *Italick*.

ed to have been published some time ago ; but, upon reflection, you resolved, To give out first, some sketch of what you was projecting^c : And accordingly, published The introductory discourse by itself, though foreseeing it would encounter all the opposition that prejudice, bigotry, and superstition are ever prepared to give, to all enquiries^a of this nature. But it was your comfort, that this would excite candid inquirers, to weigh the merit and consequences of it^c.

2. The consequences of it are tolerably plain ; even to free the good people of *England*, from all that prejudice, bigotry, and superstition, vulgarly called Christianity. But it is not so plain, that *this is the sole expedient, which can secure the Protestant religion, against the efforts of Rome*^c. It may be doubted, whether Deism is the sole expedient to secure us against

^a Preface, p. 1. ^b p. 2. ^c p. 3. ^d Ibid.

popery.

popery. For some are of opinion, there are persons in the world, who are neither Deists nor Papists.

3. You open the cause artfully enough, by a quotation from Mr. *Locke*^s. But we are agreed, to build our faith on no man's authority. His reasons will be considered in their place.

Those who have written against his and your opinion, you say, have shewn great eagerness, but little knowledge of the question: Urged by the hopes of honours, and prepared to fight for every establishment, that offers such pay to its defenders^b. I have not read one of these; Yet I would fain believe, That neither the hope of honour, nor the desire of pay, was the sole or indeed the main motive that urged either them or you to engage in writing.

^s p. 4.

^b p. 5.

A 4

But

But I grant, they are overseen, if they argue against you, by citing *the Testimonies of the antient fathers*¹: Seeing they might easily perceive you pay no more regard to these, than to the evangelists or apostles. Neither do I commend them, if they *insinuate jealousies of consequences, dangerous to Christianity*². Why they shquld *insinuate* these, I cannot conceive: I need not *insinuate*, that the sun shines at noon-day. You have *opened too great a glare to the public*³, to leave them any room for such insinuation. Though (to save appearances) you gravely declare still, *Were my argument allow'd to be true, the credit of the Gospel-miracles could not in any degree be shaken by it*⁴.

4. So far is flourish. Now we come to the point. *The present question, you say, depends on the joint credibility of the facts, and of the wit-*

¹ p. 6.

² *ibid.*

³ p. 7.

⁴ p. 6.

nesses

nesses who attest them, especially on the former. For if the facts be incredible, no testimony can alter the nature of things^a. All this is most true. You go on. The credibility of facts lies open to the trial of our reason and senses. But the credibility of witnesses depends on a variety of principles, wholly concealed from us. And though in many cases it may reasonably be presumed, yet in none can it be certainly known^b. Sir, will you retract this, or defend it? If you defend, and can prove, as well as assert it, then farewell the credit of all history, not only sacred but profane. If the credibility of witnesses (of all witnesses; for you make no distinction) depends, as you peremptorily affirm, on a variety of principles wholly concealed from us; and consequently, though it may be presumed in many cases, yet can be certainly known in none:

^a p. 9.

^b p. 10.

Then

Then it is plain, all the history of the Bible is utterly precarious and uncertain: Then I may indeed *presume*, but cannot *certainly know*, That Jesus of Nazareth ever was born: Much less that he healed the sick and raised either Lazarus or himself from the dead. Now, Sir, go and declare again, how carefull you are, for *the credit of the Gospel-miracles!*

5. But for fear any (considering how *frank and open* your *nature* is, and how *warmly disposed to speak what you take to be true*^P) should fancy you meant what you said in this declaration, you take care to inform them soon after. *The whole which the wit of man can possibly discover, either of the ways or will of the Creator, must be acquired by attending seriously (To what? To the Jewish or Christian Revelation? No; but) to that revelation which he made of him-*

self from the beginning in the beautiful fabric of this visible world⁹.

6. I believe your opponents will not hereafter urge you, either with *that passage from St. Mark* or any other from Scripture. At least, I will not : Unless I forget myself ; as I observe you have done just now. For you said but now, *Before we proceed, to examine testimonies for the decision of this dispute, our first care should be, to inform ourselves of the nature of those miraculous powers, which are the subject of it, as they are represented to us, in the history of the Gospel*¹⁰. Very true : *This should be our first care.* I was therefore all attention, to hear your account of *the nature of those powers, as they are represented to us in the Gospel.* But alas ! You say not a word more about it ; but slip away to those *zealous champions, who have attempted (bold*

⁹ p. 22.

¹⁰ p. 10.

men as they are) to refute the introductory discourse.

Perhaps you will say, "Yes, I repeat that text from St. *Mark*." You do; but not as describing the nature of those powers; but only to open the way to one of your antagonists¹; of whom you yourself affirm, That *not one of them seems to have spent a thought in considering those powers as they are set forth in the New Testament*. Consequently, the bare repeating that text, does not prove you (any more than them) to have *spent one thought upon the subject*.

7. From this antagonist you ramble away to another²; after a long citation from whom, you subjoin, *It being agreed then, that in the original promise, there is no intimation of any particular period, to which their continuance was limited*³.—Sir, you have

lost your way. We have as yet nothing to do with their *continuance*. For till we have learned from those sacred records (I use your own words) what they were, and in what manner exerted by the apostles, we cannot form a proper judgment of those evidences which are brought either to confirm or confute their continuance in the church: And must consequently dispute at random, as chance or prejudice may prompt us, about things unknown to us^z.

Now, Sir, if this be true (as without doubt it is) then it necessarily follows, That seeing from the beginning of your book to the end you spend not one page to inform either yourself or your readers, concerning the nature of these miraculous powers, as they are represented to us in the history of the Gospel: You dispute throughout the whole at random as chance or prejudice prompt you, about things unknown to you.

^z p. 11.

8. Your

8. Your ⁷ reply to the adversaries of your scheme, I may let alone for the present; and the rather, because the arguments used therein, will occur again and again. Only I would here take notice of one assertion, *That the miraculous powers confer'd on the apostles themselves, were imparted just at the moment of their exertion, and withdrawn again as soon as those particular occasions were serv'd*². You should not have asserted this, be it true or false, without some stronger proof. *This, I say, is evident*³, is not a sufficient proof; nor, *A treatise is prepared on that subject*⁴. Neither is it proved by that comment of *Grotius* on our Lord's promise, which literally translated runs thus: *To every believer there was then given some wonderfull power, which was to exert*

⁷ p. 15—27. ² p. 23. ³ ibid. ⁴ p. 24.
 • *Grotius* in *Marc.* xvi. 17. Non omnibus omnia—ita tamen cuilibet credenti tunc data sit admirabilis facultas, quæ se, non semper quidem, sed data occasione explicaret.

itself,

itself, not indeed always, but when there was occasion.

9. But waving this; I grant the single point in dispute, is, Whether the testimony of the fathers, be a sufficient ground to believe, that miraculous gifts subsisted at all, after the days of the ¹apostles? But with this you interweave another question, Whether the fathers were not all fools or knaves? In treating of which you strongly intimate, First, That such gifts did never subsist, and secondly, That the apostles were equally wise and good, with the wonder-workers (your favourite term) that followed them.

When therefore you add, *My opinion is this, that, after our Lord's ascension, the extraordinary gifts he had promised were poured out on the apostles and the other primary instruments of planting the gospel; in order to enable them to overrule the inveterate*

prejudices both of the Jews and Gentiles, and to bear up against the discouraging shocks of popular rage and persecution: I look upon all this to be mere grimace. You believe not one word of what you say. You cannot possibly, if you believe what you said before. For, who can believe both the sides of a contradiction?

10. However I will suppose you do believe it, and will argue with you from your own words. But first let us have a few more of them^f. *In process of time, as miraculous powers began to be less and less wanted, so they began gradually to decline, till they were finally withdrawn^g. And this may probably be thought to have happen'd, while some of the apostles were still living.*

These were given, you say, to the first planters of the Gospel, in order to enable them to overrule the invete-

^f p. 28. ^g ibid. ^h p. 29.

rate

terate prejudices both of Jews and Gentiles, and to bear up against the shocks of persecution. Thus far we are agreed. They were given for these ends. But if you allow this, you cannot suppose, consistently with yourself, that they were withdrawn till these ends were fully answered. So long therefore as those prejudices subsisted, and as Christians were exposed to the shocks of perfecution, you cannot deny there was the same occasion for those powers to be continued, as there was for their being given at first. And this, you say, is ^b *a postulatum which all people will grant, That they continued as long as they were necessary to the church.*

11. Now did those prejudices cease, or was persecution at an end, while some of the apostles were still living? You have yourself abundantly shewn, they did not. You know,

^b p. 11.

B

there

there was as sharp persecution in the third century, as there was in the first, as while all the apostles were living. And with regard to prejudices, you have industriously remark'd, That ⁱ the principal writers of Rome, who make any mention of the Christians, about the time of Trajan, speak of them as a set of despicable, stubborn, and even wicked enthusiasts : That ^k Suetonius calls them "a race of men of a new and mischievous superstition :" And that ⁱ Tacitus, describing the horrible tortures, which they suffered under Nero, says, "They were detested for their flagitious practices; possessed with an abominable superstition, and condemn'd not so much for their supposed crime of firing the city, as from the hatred of all mankind."

And ^m their condition, you say, continued much the same, till they were established by the civil power : Dur-

ⁱ p. 193. ^k p. 194. ^l *ibid.* ^m p. 195.

ing all which time they were constantly insulted and calumniated by their heathen adversaries, as a stupid, credulous, impious sect, the very scum of mankind. In a word, both with regard to prejudice and persecution, I read in your following page, "The heathen magistrates would not give themselves the trouble, to make the least enquiry into their manners or doctrines; but condemned them for the mere name, without examination or trial: treating a Christian of course as guilty of every crime, as an enemy of the gods, emperors, laws, and of nature itself.

12. If then the end of those miraculous powers was, *To overcome inveterate prejudices, and to enable the Christians to bear up against the shocks of persecution*: how can you possibly conceive that those powers should cease, while some of the apostles were living? With what colour can you

["] p. 196.

B 2

assert,

assert, that they *were less wanted* for these ends, in the second and third, than in the apostolic age? With what shadow of reason can you maintain, that (if they ever subsisted at all) they were finally withdrawn, before Christianity was established by the civil power? Then indeed these ends did manifestly cease; persecution was at an end; and the inveterate prejudices which had so long obtained, were in great measure rooted up; another plain reason why the powers, which were to balance these, should remain in the church so long and no longer.

13. You go on to acquaint us with the excellencies of your performance. The reader, say you, will find in these sheets, none of those arts, which are commonly employed by disputants to perplex a good cause, or to palliate a bad one: no subtle refinements, forced

constructions, or evasive distinctions, but plain reasoning grounded on plain facts, and published with an honest and disinterested view, to free the minds of men, from an inveterate imposture. I have shewn that the antient fathers, by whom that delusion was imposed, were extremely credulous and superstitious; possess'd with strong prejudices, and scrupling no art or means, by which they might propagate the same. Surely, Sir, you add the latter part of this paragraph, on purpose to confute the former: For just here you use one of the unfairest arts, which the most dishonest disputant can employ: In endeavouring to forestall the judgment of the reader, and to prejudice him against those men, on whom he ought not to pass any sentence, before he has heard the evidence.

1. In the beginning of your *Introductory discourse*, you declare the reasons which moved you to publish it. One of these, you say, was, the late increase of popery in this kingdom; chiefly occasioned, as you suppose, by the confident assertions of the *Romish* emissaries, That there has been a succession of miracles in their church, from the apostolic to the present age. To obviate this plea, you would *settle some rule of discerning the true from the false*; so as to give a reason for admitting the miracles of one age, and rejecting those of another.

2. This has a pleasing sound, and is extremely well imagined, to prejudice a protestant reader in your favour. You then slide with great art into your subject. *This claim of a miraculous power, now peculiar to the church of Rome, was asserted in all Christian countries till the reformation.*

[¶] p. 41.

[¶] p. 44.

[¶] p. 44.

But

“ But then the cheat was detected : Nay, and men began to suspect, that the church had long been governed by the same arts. For it was easy to trace them up to the primitive church, tho’ not to fix the time when the cheat began : to shew, how long after the days of the apostles, the miraculous gifts continued in the church. However it is commonly believed, that they continued till Christianity was the established religion. Some indeed extend them to the fourth and fifth centuries ; but these, you say, betray the protestant cause. For in the third, fourth, and fifth, the chief corruptions of popery were introduced, or at least the seeds of them sown.

“ By these I mean, monkery ; the worship of reliques ; invocation of saints ; prayers for the dead ; the superstitious use of images ; of the sacraments ; of the sign of the cross, and of the consecrated oil.

¹ p. 45. ² p. 46. ³ p. 50. ⁴ p. 51. ⁵ p. 52.

3. I have nothing to do with the fourth or fifth century. But to what you alledge in support of this charge, so far as it relates to the third century, I have a few things to reply.

— And first, you quote not one line from any father of the third century, in favour of *monkery, the worship of reliques, the invocation of saints, or the superstitious use either of images, or consecrated oil*. How is this, Sir? You brought eight accusations at once against the fathers of the third, as well as the following centuries: and as to five of the eight, when we call for the proof, you have not one word to say! As to the sixth, you say^x, *In the sacrament of the eucharist, several abuses were introduced*. You instance, first, in mixing the wine with water. But how does it appear, that this was any abuse at all? Or, that^y *Irenæus*

^x p. 57. ^y *ibid.*

declared

declared it to have been taught as well as practised by our Saviour? The words you quote to prove this, do not prove it at all: They simply relate a matter of fact: *"Taking the bread he confess it to be his body, and the mixt cup, he affirmed it was his blood.* You cannot be ignorant of this fact, that the cup used after the paschal supper, was always mixt with water. But *"Cyprian declared, this mixture to have been enjoined to himself by a divine revelation.* If he did, that will not prove it to be an abuse: So that you are wide of the point still. You instance next in their sending the bread to the sick; which (as well as the mixture) is mentioned by *Justin Martyr.* This fact likewise we allow: But you have not proved it to be an abuse. I grant, that near an hundred years

² *Accipiens panem, suum corpus esse confitebatur; & temperamentum calicis, suum sanguinem confirmavit.*

² p. 58.

after, some began to have a superstitious regard for this bread. But, that in Tertullian's days it was carried home and locked up as a divine treasure, I call upon you to prove: As also, ^b that infant-communion was an abuse; or the styling it *the sacrifice of the body of Christ*. I believe the offering it up for the martyrs was an abuse; and that this with the superstitious use of the sign of the cross were, if not the earliest of all, yet as early as any which crept into the Christian church.

4. 'Tis certain ^c *praying for the dead was common in the second century*: You might have said, and in the first also; seeing that petition *Thy kingdom come*, manifestly concerns the saints in paradise, as well as those upon earth. But 'tis far from certain, that *the purpose of this was, to procure relief and refreshment to*

^b p. 59. ^c p. 60.

the departed souls in some intermediate state of expiatory pains: or, that this was the general opinion of those times.

5. As to ^d the consecrated oil, you seem intirely to forget, that it was neither St. *Jerom* nor St. *Chrysostom*, but St. *James*, who said, ^e *Is any sick among you? let him send for the elders of the church. And let them pray over him, anointing him with oil, in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up.*

The sum is: You have charged the fathers of the third century with eight of the chief corruptions of popery: 1. Monks, 2. The worship of reliques, 3. Invocation of saints, 4. The superstitious use of images, 5. Of the consecrated oil, 6. Of the sacraments, 7. Of the sign of the cross, 8. Praying for the dead.

^d p. 63. ^e c. v. ¶ 14, 15.

And

And what is all this heavy charge come to at last? Why just thus much: Some of them, in the beginning of the third century, did superstitiously use the sign of the cross: and others in the middle of that century offered up the eucharist for the martyrs on their annual festivals; tho' how you make this, *the superstitious use of the sacraments*, I know not, or how these come to be the *chief corruptions of popery*.

Praying thus far for the dead, “That God would shortly accomplish the number of his elect, and hasten his kingdom,” and anointing the sick with oil, you will not easily prove, to be any corruptions at all.

As to monkery, the worship of reliques, invocation of saints, and the superstitious use of images; you have not even attempted to prove, that these

these fathers were guilty: So that, for aught appears, you might as well have charged them on the apostles. *Yet* ^f *it is no more, you solemnly assure us, than what fact and truth oblige you to say!* When I meet with any of these assurances for the time to come, I shall remember to stand upon my guard.

6. In the following pages you are arguing against the miracles of the fourth and fifth century. After which you add, *But if these must be rejected, where then are we to stop? and to what period must we confine ourselves? This indeed is the grand difficulty, and what has puzzled all the other doctors, who have considered the same question before me.* Sir, your memory is short. In this very discourse you yourself said just the contrary. You told us a while ago, ^g *that not only Dr. Marshall, Mr. Dod-*

^f p. 65. ^g p. 71. ^h p. 46. &c seq.

well,

well, and archbishop Tillotson, but the generality of the protestant doctors were agreed, to what period they should confine themselves: believing, that *miracles subsisted thro' the three first centuries, and ceased in the beginning of the fourth.*

7. However, that none of them may ever be puzzled any more, you willⁱ lay down some general principles, which may lead us to a more rational solution of the matter, than any that has hitherto been offered. Here again I was all attention. And what did the mountain bring forth? What are these general principles, preceded by so solemn a declaration, and laid down^k for thirteen pages together? Why, they are dwindled down into one, *That the forged miracles of the fourth century taint the credit of all the later miracles!* I should desire you to prove, that the mifacles of

ⁱ *ibid.* ^k p. 71—84.

the fourth century were *all forged*, but that it is not material to our question.

8. But you endeavour to shew, it is. ¹ For that surprizing confidence, you say, with which the fathers of the fourth age have affirmed as true what they themselves had forged, or at least knew to be forged [a little more proof of that:] make us suspect, that so bold a defiance of truth could not become general at once; but must have been carried gradually to that height, by custom and the example of former times. It does not appear that it did become general, till long after the fourth century. And as this supposition is not sufficiently proved, the inference from it is nothing worth.

9. You say, secondly, ² This age, in which Christianity was established, had no occasion for any miracles.

¹ p. 84. ² *ibid.*

They

They would not therefore begin to forge miracles at a time when there was no particular temptation to it. Yes, the greatest temptation in the world, if they were such men as you suppose. If they were men that would scruple no art or means, to enlarge their own credit and authority, they would naturally begin to forge miracles at that time, when real miracles were no more.

10. You say, *thirdly*, "The later fathers had equal piety with the earlier, but more learning and less credulity. If these then be found, either to have forged miracles themselves, or propagated what they knew to be forged, or to have been deluded by the forgeries of others, it must excite the same suspicion of their predecessors. I answer, 1. It is not plain, that the later fathers had equal piety with the earlier ; nor, 2. That they

* p. 85.

had

had less credulity. It seems some of them had much more; witness *Hilarion's* ^o camel, and smelling a devil or a sinner; though even he was not so quick scented as St. *Pachomius*, who (as many believe to this day) could “smell an Heretic at a mile's distance.” But if ^{3.} the earlier fathers were holier than the later, they were not only less likely to delude others, but (even on *Plato's* supposition) to be deluded themselves. For they would have more assistance from God.

II. But you say, *Fourthly, the earlier ages of the church, were not purer than the later. Nay, in some respects they were worse. For there never was any age, in which so many rank heresies were profest, or so many spurious books forged and published, under the names of Christ and his*

^o *Free Inquiry*, p. 89. ^p p. 90. ³ *Introd. Disc.*
p. 86.

apostles: Several of which are cited by the most eminent fathers of those ages, as of equal authority with the Scriptures. And none can doubt but those who would forge or make use of forged books, would make use of forged miracles.

I answer, 1. It is allowed, that before the end of the third century, the church was greatly degenerated from its first purity. Yet I doubt not, 2. But abundantly more *rank heresies* have been publickly *profest* in many later ages. But they were not publickly *protested* against, and therefore historians did not record them. 3. You cannot but know, it has always been the judgment of learned men (which you are at liberty to refute if you are able) that the far greater part of those spurious books, have been forged by heretics: and that many more were compiled by

weak well-meaning men, from what had been orally delivered down from the apostles. But, 4. There have been in the church from the beginning, men who had only the name of Christians. And these doubtless were capable of pious frauds (so called.) But this ought not to be charged upon the whole body. Add to this 5. what is observed by Mr. *Daille*. “I impute a great part of this mischief to those men, who, before the invention of printing, were the transcribers and copiers out of manuscripts. We may well presume that these men took the same liberty in forging, as St. *Jerom* complains they did in corrupting books: especially since this course was beneficial to them, which the other was not.” Much more to the same effect we have in his treatise *Of the right use of the Fathers*, Part I. Chap. iii. *N. B.* These transcribers were not all Christians, no, not in name: perhaps few, if any

of them, in the first century. 6. By what evidences do you prove, that these spurious books *are frequently cited by the most eminent fathers, as not only genuine, but of equal authority with the Scriptures themselves?* or, lastly, That they either forged these books themselves, or made use of what they knew to be forged? These things also you are not to take for granted, but to prove, before your argument can be of force.

12. We are come at last to your general¹ conclusion, *There is no sufficient reason to believe, that any miraculous powers subsisted in any age of the church after the times of the apostles.*

But pretended miracles, you say, arose thus. *As the high authority of the apostolic writings, excited some of the most learned Christians, [prove*

¹ p. 91. ² p. 92.

that] to forge books under their names; so the great fame of the apostolic miracles, would naturally excite some of the most crafty, when the apostles were dead, to attempt some juggling tricks in imitation of them. And when these artful pretenders had maintained their ground thro' the three first centuries, the leading clergy of the fourth understood their interest too well, to part with the old plea of miraculous gifts.

Round assertions indeed! but surely, Sir, you do not think that reasonable men will take these for proofs! You are here advancing a charge of the blackest nature. But where are your vouchers? Where are the witnesses to support it? Hitherto you have not been able to produce one, thro' a course of three hundred years: unless you bring in those heathen, of whose senseless shameless prejudices you have yourself given so clear an account.

" But you designed to produce your witnesses in the *Free Inquiry*, a year or two after the *Introductory discourse* was published. So you condemn them first, and try them afterwards : you will pass sentence now, and hear that evidence by and by ! A genuine specimen of that impartial regard to truth, which you profess upon all occasions.

13. Another instance of this is in your marginal note. *The primitive Christians were perpetually reproached for their gross credulity.* They were : but by whom ? Why, by *Jews* and *heathens*. Accordingly the two witnesses you produce here, are *Celsus the Jew*, and *Julian the apostate*. But lest this should not suffice, you make them confess the charge. *The fathers, your words are, defend themselves by saying, that they did no more than the philosophers had always done :*

* p. 93.

that

that Pythagoras's precepts were inculcated with an *Ipse dixit*, and they found the same method useful with the vulgar. And is this their whole defence? Do the very men to whom you refer, *Origen* and *Arnobius*, in the very tracts to which you refer, give no other answer, than this argument *ad hominem*? Stand this as another genuine proof of Dr. Middleton's candor and impartiality!

14. A further proof of your frank and open nature, and of your "contenting yourself with the discharge of your own conscience, by a free declaration of your real sentiments, I find in the very next page. Here you solemnly declare, "Christianity is confirmed by the evidence of such miracles, as, of all others on record, are the least liable to exception, and carry the clearest marks of their sincerity: being wrought by Christ and

" p. 40. " p. 94.

his apostles, for an end so great, so important, as to be highly worthy the interposition of the deity: wrought by mean and simple men, and delivered by eye-witnesses, whose characters exclude the suspicion of fraud. Sir, Do you believe one word of what you so solemnly declare? You have yourself declared the contrary. But if you do not, where shall we have you? Or how can we believe you another time? How shall we know, I will not say, when you speak truth; but when you would have us think you do? By what criterion shall we distinguish between what is spoken in your real, and what in your personated character? How discern, when you speak as Dr. Middleton, and when as the publick librarian?

15. You go on. ^{*}By granting the Romanists but a single age of miracles after the apostles we shall be in-

tangled in difficulties whence we can never extricate ourselves, till we allow the same powers to the present age. I will allow them however three ages of miracles, and let them make what advantage of it they can.

You proceed. ' If the Scriptures are a compleat rule (I reject the word sufficient, because it is ambiguous) we do not want the fathers, as guides, or if clear, as interpreters. An esteem for them has carried many into dangerous errors; the neglect of them can have no ill consequences. I answer,

1. The Scriptures are a compleat rule of faith and practice; and they are clear, in all necessary points. And yet their clearness does not prove, that they need not be explained; nor their compleatness, that they need not be enforced.
2. The esteeming the writings of the three first centuries, not equally with, but next to

the Scriptures, never carried any man yet into dangerous errors, nor probably ever will. But it has brought many out of dangerous errors, and particularly out of the errors of popery.

3. The neglect, in *your* sense, of the primitive fathers, that is, the thinking they were all fools and knaves, has this natural consequence (which I grant is no ill one, according to your principles) to make all who are not real Christians think *Jesus of Nazareth* and his apostles just as honest and wise as them.

16. You afterwards endeavour to shew, how the church of *England* came to have such an esteem for the antient fathers. There are several particulars in this account, which are liable to exception. But I let them pass; as they have little connexion with the point in question.

17. You conclude your *Introductory discourse* thus: "The design of

the p. III.

the

the present treatise, is to fix the religion of the Protestants on its proper basis, that is, in the sacred Scriptures. Here again you speak in your personated character; as also when you ^bfreely own the primitive writers, to be of use in attesting and transmitting to us the genuine books of the holy Scriptures! Books, for the full attestation as well as safe transmission whereof, you have doubtless the deepest concern.

18. I cannot dismiss this discourse, without observing, That the uncommon artfulness and disingenuity, which glare through the whole, must needs give disgust to every honest and upright heart, nor is it any credit at all to the cause you have espoused. Nay, I am persuaded there are many in these kingdoms, who, tho' they think as you do concerning the Christian system, yet could not en-

dure the thought of writing against it, in the manner that you have done: Of combating fraud (if it were so) with fraud, and practising the very thing which they protest to expose and abhor.

In your *Free Inquiry* itself you propose,

I. To draw out in order all the principal testimonies, which relate to miraculous gifts, as they are found in the writings of the fathers, from the earliest ages after the apostles: Whence we shall see at one view the whole evidence, by which they have hitherto been supported.

II. To throw together all which those fathers have delivered, concerning the persons said to have been endued with those gifts.

² *Free Inquiry*, p. 1.

III. To

III. To illustrate the particular characters and opinions of the fathers who attest those miracles.

IV. To review all the several kinds of miracles which are pretended to have been wrought, and to observe from the nature of each how far they may reasonably be suspected.

V. To refute some of the most plausible objections, which have been hitherto made.

I was in hopes you would have given, at least in entering upon your main work, what you promised so long ago, an account of the proper nature and condition of those miraculous powers, which are the subject of the whole dispute, as they are represented to us in the history of the Gospel. But as you do not appear to have any thought of doing it at all, you will

^b p. 2.

^c Preface, p. 10.

give

give me leave at length to do it for you.

The original promise of these runs thus : *These signs shall follow them that believe. In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents, and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them. They shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.*

A further account of them is given by St. Peter, on the very day whereon that promise was fullfilled. *This is that which was spoken of by the prophet Joel, And it shall come to pass in the last days, said God, your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams.*

The account given by St. Paul is a little fuller than this. *There are*

^a *Mark. xvi. 17, 18.* ^c *Act. ii. 16, 17.* ^b *1 Cor. xiii. 8—11.*

diversities of gifts (χαρισμάτων, the usual scriptural term, for the miraculous gifts of the holy Ghost) but the same spirit—For to one is given the word of wisdom—to another, the gifts of healing—To another the working of (other) miracles, to another prophesy, to another discernment of spirits: to another divers kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these worketh that one and the self-same spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will.

Hence we may observe, that the chief χαρισμάτα spiritual gifts, conferred on the apostolical church, were 1. Casting out devils, 2. Speaking with new tongues, 3. Escaping dangers in which otherwise they must have perished, 4. Healing the sick, 5. Prophesy, foretelling things to come, 6. Visions, 7. Divine dreams, and 8. Discerning of spirits.

Some

Some of these appear to have been chiefly designed for the conviction of Jews and Heathens, as the casting out devils, and speaking with new tongues ; some chiefly for the benefit of their fellow Christians, as healing the sick, foretelling things to come, and the discernment of spirits ; and all, in order to enable those who either wrought or saw them, to *run with patience the race set before them*, through all the storms of persecution, which the most inveterate prejudice, rage, and malice could raise against them.

I. 1. You are, First, *To draw out in order all the principal testimonies, which relate to miraculous gifts, as they are found in the writings of the fathers from the earliest ages after the apostles.*

You begin with the apostolic fathers, that is, those who lived and conversed

conversed with the apostles. There are several, you say, of this character, whose writings still remain to us, St. Barnabas, St. Clemens, St. Ignatius, St. Polycarp, St. Hermas. “Now if those gifts had subsisted after the days of the apostles, these must have possessed a large share of them. But if any of them had, he would have mentioned it in his writings, which not one of them has done.”

The argument, fully proposed, runs thus:

If any such gifts had subsisted in them or in their days, they must have mentioned them in their *circular epistles to the churches* (for so their predecessors, the apostles, did:) but they did not mention any such gifts therein.

Sir, Your consequence is not of any force. As will easily appear by a parallel argument.

⁶ p. 3.
D

If

If such gifts had subsisted in St. Peter, or in his days, he must have mentioned them in his *circular epistles to the churches*. But he does not mention any such gifts therein. Therefore they did not subsist in him or in his days.

Your argument therefore proves too much ; nor can it conclude against an apostolic father, without concluding against the apostle too.

If therefore the apostolic fathers, had not mentioned any miraculous gifts, in their *circular epistles to the churches*, you could not have inferred that they possest none : Since neither does he mention them in his *circular epistles*, whom you allow to have possest them.

Of all the apostles you can produce but one, St. Paul, who makes mention of these gifts. And that, not in his *circular epistles* to the churches.

churches. For I know not that he wrote any such.

2. All this time I have been arguing on your own suppositions, That these five apostolic fathers, all wrote *circular epistles to the churches*, and yet *never mentioned these gifts therein*. But neither of these suppositions is true. For 1. *Hermas* wrote no epistle at all: 2. Although the rest wrote epistles to particular churches, (*Clemens to the Corinthians, Ignatius to the Romans &c.*) yet not one of them wrote any *circular epistle to the churches*, like those of St. James and St. Peter (unless we allow that to be a genuine epistle, which bears the name of St. *Baraabas*.) 3. You own, they all ^b*speak of spiritual gifts, as abounding among the Christians of that age*: But assert, *These cannot mean any thing more, than faith, hope, and charity*. You assert—But the proof,

^b *ibid.*

D 2

Sir;

Sir; I want the proof. Though I am but one of the *vulgar*, yet I am not half so *credulous* as you apprehend the first Christians to have been. *Ipse dixi* will not satisfy me; I want plain, clear, logical proof; especially, when I consider, how much you build upon this; that it is the main foundation whereon your hypothesis stands. You yourself must allow, that in the epistles of St. Paul, πνευματικὰ χαρισματα spiritual gifts, does always mean more than faith, hope, and charity; that it constantly means *miraculous gifts*. How then do you prove, That in the epistles of St. Ignatius, it means quite another thing? Not miraculous gifts, but only the ordinary gifts and graces of the Gospel? I thought the ¹ reader was to find no evasive distinctions in the following sheets. Prove then that this distinction is not evasive: That the same

¹ Preface, p. 31.

words mean absolutely different things. Till this is clearly and solidly done, reasonable men must believe that this and the like expressions mean the same thing in the writings of the apostolical fathers, as they do in the writings of the apostles; namely, not the *ordinary graces* of the Gospel, but the *extraordinary gifts* of the Holy Ghost.

3. You aim indeed at a proof, which would be home to the point, if you were but able to make it out. ^kThese fathers themselves seem to disclaim all gifts of a more extraordinary kind. Thus Polycarp, in his epistle to the Philippians, says, “neither I, nor any other such as I am, can come up to the wisdom of the blessed Paul.” And in the same epistle he declares, “It was not granted to him to practise that, Be ye angry and sin not.” St. Ignatius also, in his epistle to the Eph-

^k p. 7.

sians, says, “¹ These things I prescribe to you, not as if I were some body extraordinary. For though I am bound for his name, I am not yet perfect in Christ Jesus.” I think verily, these extraordinary proofs may stand without any reply.

4. Yet you courteously add, ^m If from the passages refer’d to above, or any other, it should appear probable to any, that they were favour’d on some occasions, with some extraordinary illuminations, visions, or divine impressions: I shall not dispute that point, but remind them only, that these gifts were granted for their particular comfort, and do not therefore in any manner affect or relate to the question now before us.

I ask pardon, Sir. These do so deeply affect, so nearly relate to the question now before us, even as stat-

¹ p. 8.

^m p. 10.

ed by "yourself, that in allowing these, you give up the substance of the question. You yourself have declared, That one great end of the *extraordinary gifts* confer'd on the apostles, was, *To enable them to bear up against the shocks of popular rage and persecution.* Now were not *extraordinary illuminations, visions, and impressions*, if given at all, given for this very end? *For their particular comfort*, as you now word it? Therefore in allowing these to the apostolic fathers, you allow *extraordinary gifts* which had been formerly granted to the apostles, to have *subsisted in the church after the days of the apostles*, and for the same end as they did before.

5. Therefore the apostolic writers have not left us in the dark, with regard to our present argument. And consequently your triumph comes too soon : [°]Here then we have an interval

^a *Preface.* p. 28. ^b p. 9.

of half a century, in which we have the strongest reason to presume, that the extraordinary gifts of the apostolic age were withdrawn. No; not if all the apostolic fathers speak of spiritual gifts, as abounding among the Christians of that age: Not if extraordinary illuminations, visions, and divine impressions still subsisted among them. For as to your now putting in, as exerted openly in the church for the conviction of unbelievers, I must desire you, to put it out again; it comes a great deal too late. The question between you and me was stated without it, above an hundred pages since. Although if it be admitted it will do you no service: Seeing your proposition is overthrown, if there were miraculous gifts after the days of the apostles, whether they were openly exerted for the conviction of unbelievers or not.

6. I was a little surprised, that you should take your leave of the aposto-

apostolic fathers so soon. But upon looking forward, my surprize was at an end : I found you was not guilty of any design to spare them : But only delay'd your remarks till the reader should be prepared, for what might have shock'd him, had it stood in its proper place.

I do not find indeed, that you make any objection, to any part of the epistles of *Ignatius* : No nor of the catholic epistle, as it is called, which is inscribed with the name of *Barnabas*. This clearly convinces me, you have not read it; I am apt to think, not one page of it : Seeing, if you had, you would never have let slip such an opportunity of exposing one that was called an apostolic father.

7. But it would have been strange if you had not somewhere brought in the famous *Phœnix* of *Clemens Romanus*. And yet you are very mercifull

cifull upon the head, barely remarking concerning it, That ^p he alledged the ridiculous story of the Phœnix, as a type and proof of the resurrection. Whether all the heathen writers treat it as nothing else but a mere fable, I know not. But that it is so is certain; and consequently the argument drawn from it is weak and inconclusive. Yet it will not hence follow, either that *Clemens* was a wicked man, or that he had none of the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit.

8. There is no real blemish to be found, in the whole character of St. *Polycarp*. But there is one circumstance left upon record concerning him, which has the appearance of weakness. And with this you do not fail to acquaint your reader, at a convenient season; namely, ^q that in the most antient dispute, concerning the time of holding Easter, St. Polycarp

^p p. 55.

^q p. 60.

and

and Anicetus severally alledged apostolic tradition for their different practice. And 'tis not improbable, that both alledged what was true; that in a point of so little importance, the apostles varied themselves; some of them observing it on the fourteenth day of the moon, and others not. But be this as it may, it can be no proof, either that *Poly-carp* was not an holy man, or that he was not favoured with the extraordinary, as well as ordinary gifts of the spirit.

9. With regard to the narrative of his martyrdom, you affirm, 'It is one of the most authentick pieces in all primitive antiquity. I will not vouch for its authenticity: nor therefore for the story of the dove, the flame forming an arch, the fragrant smell, or the revelation to *Pionius*. But your attempt to account for these

¹ p. 124.

things, is truly curious. You say, *An arch of flame round his body, is an appearance which might easily happen, from the common effects of wind. And the dove said to fly out of him, might be conveyed into the wood which was prepared to consume him.* How much more naturally may we account for both, by supposing the whole to be a modern fiction, wrote on occasion of that account mentioned by *Eusebius*, but lost many ages ago? But whatever be thought of this account of his death, neither does this affect the question, Whether during his life he was endued with the miraculous gifts of the Holy Ghost.

10. There is one of those whom you style apostolic fathers yet behind, of whom you talk full as familiarly as of the rest. I mean, *Hermas*: *To whom, you say, some impute the*

* p. 229. † p. 37.

fraud of forging the Sibylline books.
 It would not have been amiss, if you had told us, which of the antients, whether Christian, Jew, or Heathen, ever accused him of this. If none ever did, some will be apt to think, 'tis giving a person but hard measure, to bring an accusation against him which never was heard of, till sixteen hundred years after his death.

But I can the more easily excuse you, because he is a person whom you are wholly unacquainted with. Though 'tis much, curiosity did not lead you, when you had archbishop *Wake's* translation in your hand, to read over if it were but half a dozen pages of his famous *Shepherd*. But charity obliges me to believe you never did. Otherwise I cannot conceive you would so peremptorily affirm, of him and the rest together, *There's* is not the least claim or pre-

tension, in all their several pieces, to any of those extraordinary gifts, which are the subject of this inquiry. I am amazed! Sir, have you never a friend in the world? If you was yourself ignorant of the whole affair, would no one inform you, that all the three books of *Hermas*, from the first page to the last, are nothing else than a recital of his *extraordinary gifts*, his *visions, prophesies, and revelations?*

Can you expect after this, that any man in his senses, should take your word for any thing under heaven? That any one should credit any thing which you affirm? Or believe you any farther than he can see you? *Jesus* whom you persecute can forgive you this. But how can you forgive yourself? One would think, you should be crying out, day and night, “*The Shepherd of Hermas will not let me sleep.*”

11. You

11. You proceed to the testimony of *"Justin Martyr*, who wrote about fifty years after the apostles. He says (I translate his words literally) *There are prophetic gifts among us even until now. You may see with us, both women and men, having gifts from the spirit of God.* He particularly insists on that of *casting out devils*, as what every one might see with his own eyes.

"Irenæus, who wrote somewhat later, affirms, *That all who were truly disciples of Jesus, wrought miracles in his name: some cast out devils; others had visions or the knowledge of future events; others healed the sick—* And as to raising the dead, he declares it to have been frequently performed, on necessary occasions, by great fasting, and the joint supplication of the church. And we hear many, says he, speaking with all kind of tongues, and expounding the mysteries of God.*

^u p. 10.

^w p. 11.

^x p. 12.

Theophi-

11. *Theophilus, bishop of Antioch, who lived in the same age, speaks of casting out devils as then common in the church.*

12. *Tertullian, who flourished toward the end of the second century, challenges the heathen magistrates, to "call before their tribunals, any person possest with a devil. And if the evil spirit when commanded by any Christian, did not confess himself to be a devil, who elsewhere called himself a God, they should take the life of that Christian."*

13. *Minutius Felix, supposed to have wrote in the beginning of the third century, addressing himself to his heathen friend, says, "The greatest part of you know, what confessions the Demons make concerning themselves, when we expell them out the bodies of men."*

¹ p. 12.

² *ibid.*

² p. 13.

13. *Origen,*

13. ^b Origen, something younger than Minutius declares, That there remained still the manifest indications of the Holy Spirit. "For the Christians, says he, cast out devils, perform many cures, foretell things to come—And many have been converted to Christianity by visions. I have seen many examples of this sort."

^c In another place he says, "Signs of the Holy Ghost were shewn, at the beginning of the teaching of Jesus: (not as you translate it, miracles began with the preaching of Jesus: that is quite a different thing:) more were shewn after his ascension, but afterwards fewer. However even now there are still some remains of them with a few, whose souls are cleansed by the word, and a life conformable to it." ^d Again, "Some, says he, heal the sick. I myself have seen many so healed, of loss of senses,

madness and innumerable other evils, which neither men nor devils could cure. ^a And this is done, not by magical arts, but by prayer, and certain plain adjurations, such as any common Christian may use: for generally common men do things of this kind."

14. ^b Cyprian, who wrote about the middle of the third century, says, " Beside the visions of the night, even in the day time, innocent children among us are filled with the Holy Spirit, and in extasies see and hear and speak those things, by which God is pleased to admonish and instruct us. Elsewhere he particularly mentions the casting out devils: " Which, says he, ^c either depart immediately, or by degrees, according to the faith of the patient, or the grace of him that works the cure."

^d Arnobius, who is supposed to have wrote in the year of Christ 303, tells

us, “Christ appears even now to men unpolluted, and eminently holy who love him:—Whose very name puts evil spirits to flight; strikes their prophets dumb, deprives the soothsayers of the power of answering, and frustrates the acts of arrogant magicians.”

• Lactantius, who wrote about the same time, speaking of evil spirits says, “Being adjured by Christians, they retire out of the bodies of men—confess themselves to be Demons, and tell their names, even the same which are adored in the temples.”

15. [•] These, you say, are the principal testimonies which assert miraculous gifts, through the three first centuries: which might be supported by many more of the same kind, from the same as well as different writers. But none will scruple to risk the fate of the cause upon these. Thus

• p. 18. [•] p. 19,

E 2

far

far I do not scruple it. I do not doubt but the testimonies of these nine witnesses, added to the evidence of the apostolic Fathers, will satisfy every impartial man, with regard to the point in question. Yet I see no cause, if there are nine witnesses more, to give up their evidence: seeing you may possibly raise objections against these, which the others are unconcerned in.

If then you should invalidate what I have to reply, in behalf of the witnesses now produced, you will have done but half your work: I shall afterwards require a fair hearing for the others also.

16. ⁵ You close this head with remarking, 1. *That the silence of all the apostolic writers on the subject of these gifts, must dispose us to conclude, they were then withdrawn.* O Sir, mention this no more. I intreat you,

⁵ p. 19.

I

never

never name their silence again. They speak loud enough to shame you as long as you live. You cannot therefore talk with any grace, of *the pretended revival of them, after a cessation of forty or fifty years: or draw conclusions from that which never was.*

Your second remark is perfectly new: I dare say, none ever observed before yourself, that this particular circumstance of the primitive Christians, *carried with it an air of imposture, namely, their ^h challenging all the world to come and see, the miracles which they wrought!* To compleat the argument you should have added: *And their staking their lives upon the performance of them.*

17. I doubt, you have not got one step forward yet. You have indeed advanced many bold assertions: But

^h p. 21.

E 3

you

you have not fairly proved one single conclusion, with regard to the point in hand.

But a natural effect of your lively imagination is, that from this time you argue more and more weakly ; inasmuch as the farther you go, the more things you imagine (and only imagine) yourself to have proved. Consequently as you gather up more mistakes, every step you take, every page is more precarious than the former.

II. 1. The second thing you proposed was, *To throw together all which those fathers have delivered, concerning the persons said to have been endued with the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit.*

Now whenever we think or speak with reverence, say you, of those primitive times, it is always with regard to these very fathers, whose testimo-

nies I have been collecting. And they were indeed the chief persons and champions of the Christian cause, the pastors, bishops, and martyrs of the primitive church: namely, *Justin Martyr, Irenæus, Theophilus, Tertullian: Minutius Felix, Origen, Cyprian, Arnobius, Lactantius*. Sir, you stumble at the threshold. A common dictionary may inform you, that these were not all, either pastors, bishops, or martyrs.

2. You go on as you set out. Yet¹ none of these have any where affirmed, that they themselves were induced with any power of working miracles. You should say, With any of those extraordinary gifts, promised by our Lord, and conferred on his apostles.

No! Have none of these any where affirmed, that they themselves were induced with any extraordinary gifts?

¹ p. 22.

What think you of the very first of them? *Justin Martyr*? Either you are quite mistaken, in the account you give of him ^k elsewhere, or he *affirmed this of himself* over and over. And as to *Cyprian*, you will, by and by, spend ^l several pages together, on the extraordinary gifts he *affirmed himself* to be indued with.

But suppose they had not *any where affirmed this of themselves*, What would you infer therefrom? That they were not indued with any extraordinary gifts? Then by the very same method of arguing, you might prove that neither *St. Peter*, nor *James*, nor *John*, were indued with any such. For neither do they *any where affirm this of themselves*, in any of the writings which they have left behind them.

3. Your argument concerning the apostolic fathers, is just as conclusive

^k p. 27, 30. ^l p. 101. & seq.

as this. For if you say, “The writers following the apostolic fathers, do not affirm them to have had any miraculous gifts; therefore they had none:” by a parity of reason, you must say, “The writers following the apostles, do not affirm them to have had any miraculous gifts; therefore the apostles had none.”

4. Your next argument against the existence of those gifts is, “That the fathers do not tell us the names of them which had them.” This is not altogether true. The names of *Justin Martyr* and *Cyprian* are pretty well known: as is, among the learned, that of ^m*Dionysius* bishop of *Alexandria*. But what if they did not? Supposing miraculous powers were openly exerted in the church: and that not only they themselves, but *every one else might* see this whenever they pleased: if any heathen

^m p. 106, 212.

might

might *come and see*, whenever he pleased, what could a reasonable man desire more? What did it signify to him, to know the names of those, whom he heard prophesying, or saw working miracles? Tho' without doubt, whoever saw the miracles wrought, might easily learn the names of those that wrought them: which nevertheless the Christians had no need to publish abroad, to expose them so much the more to the rage and malice of their persecutors.

6. Your third argument is, "The Christian workers of miracles were always charged with imposture by their adversaries. Lucian tells us, "Whenever any crafty juggler went to the Christians, he grew rich immediately." And Celsus represents the Christian wonder-workers, as mere vagabonds

^a p. 23.

and

and common cheats, who rambled about to fairs and markets.

And is it any wonder, That either a Jew or a Heathen should represent them thus ? Sir, I do not blame you here for not believing the Christian system, but for betraying so gross a partiality : For gleaning up every scrap of heathen scandal, and palming it upon us as unquestionable evidence ; and for not translating even these miserable fragments, with any accuracy or faithfulness. Instead of giving us the text, bad as it is, you commonly substitute a paraphrase yet worse. And this the unlearned reader naturally supposes, to be a faithfull translation. It is no credit to your cause, if it needs such supports. And this is no credit to you, if it does not.

To that of *Lucian* and *Celsus*, you add the evidence of *Cæcilius* too, who calls, say you, these workers of miracles,
a lurk-

a lurking nation, shunning the light.
 Then they were strangely altered all on a sudden. For you ^o told us, That just before they were proving themselves cheats by a widely different method ; by *calling out both upon magistrates and people, and challenging all the world to come and see what they did!*

I was not aware, that you had yet begun *To throw together all which the fathers have delivered, concerning the persons said to have been indued with those extraordinary gifts.* And, it seems, you have made an end of it ! And accordingly you proceed to sum up the evidence, to *observe upon the whole,* ^r *From these characters of the primitive wonder-workers, as given both by friends and enemies, we may fairly conclude that the gifts of those ages were generally engrossed by private Christians, who travelled about from*

city to city, to assist the ordinary preachers, in the conversion of Pagans, by the extraordinary miracles they pretended to perform.

Characters given both by friends and enemies! Pray, Sir, what Friends have you cited for this character? Or what enemies, except only *Celsus the Jew?* (And you are a miserable interpreter for him.) So from the single testimony of such a witness, you lay it down as an oracular truth, That all the miracle-workers of the three first ages, were *mere vagabonds and common cheats*, rambling about from city to city, to assist in converting heathens, by tricks and imposture! And this you ingenuously call, *Throwing together all which the fathers have delivered concerning them!*

9. But to compleat all, ⁹ Here again, say you, we see a dispensation

² *ibid.*

of

of things ascribed to *GOD*, quite different from that which we meet with in the *New Testament*. We see a dispensation! Where? Not in the primitive church. Not in the writings of one single Christian: Not of one Heathen; and only of one Jew: (For poor *Celsus* had not a second; though he multiplies under your forming hand, into a cloud of witnesses.) He alone ascribes this to the antient Christians, which you in their name ascribe to *God*. With the same regard to truth you go on. *In those days the power of working miracles* (you should say, *The extraordinary gifts*) *was committed to none but those who presided in the church of Christ.* *Ipse dixit*, for that. But I cannot take your word: especially when the apostles and evangelists say otherwise. *But upon the pretended revival of those powers—* Sir, we do not pretend the revival of them; seeing we shall believe they never

never were intermitted till you can prove the contrary—*We find the administration of them committed, not to those who had the government of the church; not to the bishops, the martyrs, or the principal champions of the Christian cause, but to boys, to women, and, above all, to “private and obscure laymen:” Not only of an inferior, but sometimes also of a bad character.*

Surely, Sir, you talk in your sleep. You could never talk thus, if you had your eyes open and your understanding about you. *We find the administration of them committed, not to those who had the government of the church.* — No ! I thought *Cyprian* had had the government of the church at *Carthage*, and *Dionysius* at *Alexandria* ! *Not to the bishops.* Who were these then, that were mentioned last? Bishops or no bishops? *Not to the martyrs*—Well, if *Cyprian* was neither

ther bishop nor martyr, I hope you will allow Justin's claim — Not to the principal champions of the Christian cause. And yet you told us not three pages since, that these very fathers were the chief champions of the Christian cause in those days ? But to boys, and to women. I answer, This is that which was spoken of by the prophet Joel, It shall come to pass, that I will pour out my Spirit, saith the Lord, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy : A circumstance which turns this argument full against you, till you openly avow you do not believe those prophecies. And above all to private and obscure laymen, not only of an inferior, but sometimes of a bad character. I answer, 1. You cite only one *ante-nicene* writer, to prove them committed to private and obscure laymen. And he says this and no more, generally + private men do

† ὡς ἐπίπτων ἴδιωταις τὸ τοιῷτοι πρότιμοι. Osigen. Cont.
Cels. I. vii.

things

things of this kind. By what rule of grammar you construe *idiōtai* *private* and *obscure laymen*, I know not.

2. To prove these were sometimes men of a bad character, you quote also but one *ante-nicene* father. (For I presume you will not assert the genuineness of the (so called) *apostolical constitutions*.) And that one is, in effect, none at all. It is *Tertullian*, who in his *Prescription against heretics*, says, † *They will add many things of the authority (or power) of every heretical teacher : That they raised the dead, healed the sick, foretold things to come. — They will add —* But did *Tertullian* believe them? There is no shadow of reason to think he did. And if not, what is all this to the purpose? No more than the tales of latter ages which you add, concerning the miracles wrought by *bones and reliques*.

† *Adjicent multa de autoritate cuiusque doctoris hæretici, illos mortuos fuscitasse, debiles reformatasse, &c.*

10. * These things, you add, are so strange, as to give just reason to suspect, that there was some original fraud in the case, and that those strolling wonder-workers, by a dexterity of juggling, imposed upon the pious fathers, whose strong prejudices and ardent zeal for the interest of Christianity, would dispose them to embrace, without examination, whatever seem'd to promote so good a cause. You now speak tolerably plain, and would be much disappointed if those, who have no strong prejudices for Christianity, did not apply what you say of these strolling wonder-workers to the apostles, as well as their successors.

A very short answer will suffice. *These things are so strange.* They are more strange than true. You have not proved one jot or tittle of them yet. Therefore the consequences you

draw must fall to the ground, till you find them some better support.

12. Nay, but *it is certain and notorious*, you say, *that this was really the case in some instances*: That is, That strolling, juggling wonder-workers imposed upon the pious fathers. Sir, I must come in again with my cuckoo's note, 'The proof? Where is the proof? Till this is produced I cannot allow that *this is certain and notorious*, even in one individual instance.

13. Let us now stand still and observe, what it is you have made out, under this second head. What you proposed was, *To throw together all which the primitive fathers had delivered, concerning the persons said to be then endued with the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit.* And how have you executed what you proposed?

• p. 26.

F 2

You

You have thrown together a quotation from a Jew, two from Heathens, three quarters of a line from *Origen*, and three lines from *Tertullian* (nothing at all, it is true, to the point in question. But that you could not help.)

14. And *this*, it seems, is *'all you have been able to draw, from any of the primitive writers, concerning the persons who were endued with the extraordinary gifts of the Holy Ghost!*

Permit me, Sir, to apply to *you*, what was spoken on another occasion. *Sir, the well is deep, and thou hast nothing to draw:* Neither sufficient skill, nor industry and application. Besides, you are resolved to draw out of the well, what was never in it, and must of course lose all your labour.

III. i. You are, *Thirdly*, to shew the particular characters and opinions of those fathers who attest these gifts.

Suffer me to remind you, that you mentioned nine of these, *Justin, Ireneus, Theophilus, Tertullian, Minutius Felix, Origen, Cyprian, Arnobius, and Lactantius*. You are therefore now to shew, what were the particular characters and opinions of these fathers.

Indeed, I should think, their opinions had small relation to the question. But since you think otherwise, I am prepared to hear you.

You premise, 'That an unexceptionable witness must have both judgment and honesty: And then passing over the apostolic fathers (as supposing them on your side) endeavour to shew, that these other fathers had neither.'

* p. 26.

F 3

You

2. You begin with "Justin Martyr, who, you say, frequently affirms, that the miraculous gift of expounding the holy Scriptures, or the mysteries of God, was granted to himself, by the special grace of God. Upon which I observe, 1. It is not yet agreed among learned men, that *declaring the mysteries of God*, is the same thing with *expounding the holy Scriptures*. 2. It is not clear, that *Justin* does affirm, his being endued either with one or the other. At least, not from the passages which you cite. The first, literally translated, runs thus: * *He hath revealed to us whatsoever things we have understood by his grace from the Scriptures also: the other, † I have not any such power; but God has given me the grace*

^a p. 27.

* Ἀπικαλυψεν ἐν ὑμῖν πάντα σαντὸν τὸ γένερον διὰ τῆς χάριτος αὐτῷ περιηκάμεν. Dial. Par. 2.

† Οὐδὲ γὰρ δύναμις ἔμοι τοιάντη τῆς ἐστιν, ἀλλὰ χάρις παρὰ Θεοῦ ἐσόδη μοι εἰς το συνέντα τὰς γραφὰς αὐτῷ. ibid.

to understand his Scriptures. Now, Sir, by which of these does it appear, that *Justin* affirms he had the *miraculous gift of expounding* the *Scriptures?*

3. However you will affirm it, were it only to have the pleasure of confuting it. In order to which you recite three passages from his writings, wherein he interprets Scripture weakly enough: and then add (after a strained compliment to Dr. *Grabe*, and a mangled translation of one of his remarks) * *His works are but little else than a wretched collection of interpretations of the same kind. Yet this pious father insists, that they were all suggested to him from heaven.* No; neither one nor the other. Neither do interpretations of Scripture (good or bad) make up the tenth part of his writings: nor does he insist, that *all* those which are found

* p. 30.

therin, were suggested to him from heaven. This does not follow from any passage you have cited yet: nor from his saying in a particular case, *Do you think I could have understood these things in the Scriptures, if I had not by the will of God received the grace to understand them?*

4. However, now you clap your wings. *What credit, say you, can be due to this father, in the report of other peoples gifts, who was so grossly deceived, or willing at least to deceive others, in this confident attestation of his own?* The answer is plain and obvious. 'Tis not clear, that he attests his own at all. Consequently, as yet his credit is unblemished.

" But he did not understand *Hebrew*, and gave a wrong derivation of the *Hebrew* word, *Satan*." Allowing this, That he was no good ety-

* p. 30.

mologist,

mologist, his credit as a witness may be as good as ever.

5. But to blast his credit for ever, you will now reckon up all the heresies which he held. And first, *He² believed the doctrine of the Millennium*; or, “*That all the saints should be raised in the flesh, and reign with Christ, in the enjoyment of all sensual pleasures, for a thousand years before the general resurrection.*” These you mark as tho’ they were *Justin’s* words. I take knowledge you hold, no faith is to be kept with heretics: and that all means are fair which conduce to so good an end, as driving the Christian heresy out of the world.

’Tis by this principle only that I can account for your adding, *Which doctrine* [that of their enjoying all sensual pleasures] *he deduces from the testimony of the prophets; and of*

St. John the apostle: and was followed in it by the fathers of the second and third centuries.

The doctrine (as you very well know) which *Justin deduced from the prophets and the apostle*, and in which he was undoubtedly followed by the fathers of the second and third centuries, is this:

The souls of them who have been martyred for the witness of *Jesus*, and for the word of *God*, and who have not worshipped the beast, neither received his mark, shall live and reign with *Christ* a thousand years.

But the rest of the dead shall not live again, until the thousand years are finished.

Now to say, they believed this, is neither more nor less, than to say, they believed the Bible.

6. The

6. The second heresy you charge him with, is the believing, “ ‘That those Sons of God mentioned, Gen. vi. 4. of whom it is there said, *They came in unto the daughters of men, and they bare children to them;* were evil angels.’ ” And I allow, he too lightly received this, on the testimony of the Jewish commentators. But this only proves, that he was a fallible man: not that he was a knave; or that he had not eyes and ears.

7. You charge him, thirdly, With treating² the spurious books, published under the names of the Sibyl and Hystaspes, with the same reverence as the prophetic Scriptures. His words are, *By the power of evil spirits, it was made death, to read the books of Hystaspes, or of the Sibyl, or of the prophets.* Well: how does this prove, that he treated those books

St. John the apostle: and was followed in it by the fathers of the second and third centuries.

The doctrine (as you very well know) which *Justin deduced from the prophets and the apostle*, and in which he was undoubtedly followed by the fathers of the second and third centuries, is this:

The souls of them who have been martyred for the witness of *Jesus*, and for the word of *God*, and who have not worshipped the beast, neither received his mark, shall live and reign with *Christ* a thousand years.

But the rest of the dead shall not live again, until the thousand years are finished.

Now to say, they believed this, is neither more nor less, than to say, they believed the Bible.

6. The

6. The second heresy you charge him with, is the believing, “ ²That those Sons of God mentioned, Gen. vi. 4. of whom it is there said, *They came in unto the daughters of men, and they bare children to them;* were evil angels.” And I allow, he too lightly received this, on the testimony of the Jewish commentators. But this only proves, that he was a fallible man: not that he was a knave; or that he had not eyes and ears.

7. You charge him, thirdly, With *treating² the spurious books, published under the names of the Sibyl and Hystaspes, with the same reverence as the prophetic Scriptures.* His words are, *By the power of evil spirits, it was made death, to read the books of Hystaspes, or of the Sibyl, or of the prophets.* Well: how does this prove, that he *treated those books*

with the same reverence as the prophetic Scriptures?

But it is certain, you say, that from this example and authority of Justin, they were held in the highest veneration by the fathers and rulers of the church, thro' all succeeding ages.

I do not conceive, it is certain. I wait your proof, first, of the fact; next, of the reason you assign for it. The fact itself, That these books were held in the highest veneration, by the fathers and rulers thro' all succeeding ages, is in no wise proved by that single quotation from *Clemens Alexandrinus*, wherein he urges the heathens with the testimonies of their own authors, of the *Sibyl*, and of *Hystaspes*. We cannot infer from hence, that he himself held them in the highest veneration: much less, that all the fathers did. And as to

the reason you assign for that veneration, *the example and authority of Justin*, you cite no writer of any kind, good or bad. So he that will believe it, may.

But *some*, you tell us, *impute the forging of these books to Justin*. Be pleased to tell us likewise, who those are: and what grounds they alledge for that imputation. Till then, it can be of no signification.

8. You charge him, fourthly, “With believing that silly story, concerning the Septuagint version of the *Old Testament*: with saying, that he himself, when at *Alexandria*, saw the remains of the cells in which the translators were shut up; and with making a considerable mistake in the chronology relating thereto.” And if all this be allowed, and over and above, that he “frequently cites apocryphal books, and

cites the Scriptures by memory :” what have you gained, toward the proof of your grand conclusion, that “ he was either too great a fool, or too great a knave, to be believed touching a plain matter of fact.”

9. You seem sensible of this, and therefore add, fifthly, *It will be said perhaps, that these instances shew a weakness of judgment, but do not touch the credit of Justin as a witness of fact.* But can you scrape up nothing from all the dunghills of antiquity that does? I dare say, you will do your utmost. And, first, you reply, *The want of judgment alone may, in some cases, disqualify a man from being a good witness.* Thus *Justin himself was imposed upon, by those of Alexandria, who shewed him some old ruins under the name of cells.* And so he was by those who told him, *there was a statue at Rome,*

[¶] p. 39. [¶] p. 40.

inscribed Simoni Deo Sancto: whereas it was really inscribed, Semoni Sanco Deo; to an old deity of the Sabines^e. Now, say you, if he was deceived in such obvious facts, how much the more easily would he be deceived, by subtle and crafty impostors? Far less easily. A man of good judgment may be deceived in the inscriptions of statues, and points of antient history. But if he has only eyes and ears, and a small degree of common sense, he cannot be deceived in facts where he is both an eye and ear-witness.

10. For a parting blow, you endeavour to prove, sixtly, That Justin was a knave as well as a fool. To this end you remark, "That he charges^h the Jews, with erasing three passages out of the Greek Bibles; one whereof stands there still, and the other two were not expunged by some

Jew, but added by some Christians. Nay that able critic and divine John Croius [you know when to bestow honourable appellations] says, Justin forged and published this passage, for the confirmation of the Christian doctrine, as well as the greatest part of the Sibylline oracles, and the sentences of Mercurius.

With far greater probability than John Croius asserts, That Justin forged these passages, a man of candor would hope that he read them in his copy (though incorrect) of the Greek Bible. And till you disprove this, or prove the assertion of Croius, you are got not a jot farther still. But notwithstanding you have taken true pains, to blacken him, both with regard to his morals and understanding, he may still be an honest man, and an unexceptionable witness, as to plain facts done before his face.

11. You fall upon ¹ *Irenæus* next, and carefully enumerate all the mistakes in his writings. As First, that he held the doctrine of the Millennium, and related a weak fancy of *Papias* concerning it. 2. That he believed our Saviour to have lived fifty years: Thirdly, That he believed *Enoch* and *Elias* were translated, and St. *Paul* caught up into that very paradise from which *Adam* was expel'd: (So he might, and *all the later fathers* with him, without being either the better or the worse.) Fourthly, that he believed the story concerning the Septuagint version: Nay, and that the Scriptures were destroyed in the *Babylonish* captivity, but restored again after seventy years by *Esdras*, inspired for that purpose. *In this also* (you say, but do not prove) he was followed by *all the principal fathers* that succeeded him: *Although there is no better foundation for it, than that*

¹ p. 44.

fabulous relation in the second book of Esdras. You add, Fifthly, that “he believed the sons of God, who came in to the daughters of men, were evil angels:” And *all the early fathers, you are very ready to believe, were drawn into the same error, by the authority of the apocryphal book of Enoch, cited by St. Jude.*

12. It is not only out of your good-will to St. Jude, or Irenaeus, you gather up all these fragments of error, that nothing be lost, but also to the whole body of the antient Christians. For *all those absurdities, you say, were taught by the fathers of those ages, (naturally implying, by all the fathers) as doctrines of the universal church, derived immediately from the apostles; and thought so necessary, that those who held the contrary, were hardly considered as real Christians.* Here I must beg you to prove as well as assert, 1. That all these absurdities, of the

the Millennium in the grossest sense of it, of the age of Christ, of Paradise, of the destruction of the Scriptures, of the Septuagint version, and of evil angels mixing with women, were taught by all the fathers of those ages: 2. That all those fathers taught these as doctrines of the universal church, derived immediately from the apostles, and 3. That they all denied those to be real Christians, who held the contrary.

13. You next cite two far fetched interpretations of Scripture, and a weak saying out of the writings of *Irenæus*. But all three prove no more, than that in these instances, he did not speak with strictness of judgment: Not, that he was incapable of knowing what he saw with his own eyes, or of truly relating it to others.

Before we proceed to what with equal good-humour and impartiality you remark concerning the rest of these fathers, it will be proper to consider what more is *interspersed* concerning these *in the sequel of this argument.*

14. And, first, you say, "^m *Justin* used an inconclusive argument, for the existence of the souls of men after death." It is possible he might, but whether it was conclusive or no, this does not affect his moral character.

You say, secondly, "*It was the common opinion of all the fathers, taken from the authority of Justin Martyr, that the Demons wanted the fumes of the sacrifices to strengthen them, for the enjoyment of their lustfull pleasures.*

^m p. 67. ⁿ p. 69.

Sir,

[101]

Sir, no man of reason will believe this, concerning one of the fathers, upon your bare assertion. I must therefore desire you to prove by more than a scrap of a sentence, 1. That *Justin* himself held this opinion, 2. That he invented it, 3. That it was the common opinion of all the fathers, and 4. That they all took it on his authority.

15. You affirm, thirdly, *He says, that all devils yield and submit to the name of Jesus: As also, to the name of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.* Very likely he may.

Lastly, you cite a passage from him, concerning the Spirit of God, influencing the minds of holy men. But neither does this in any measure affect his credit as a witness of fact. Consequently, after all that you *have been able to draw*, either from him-

^o p. 85.

G 3 self,

self, or any of the primitive writers, here is one witness of unquestionable credit, touching the miracles wrought in the primitive church, touching the subsistence of the extraordinary gifts, after the days of the apostles.

16. But let us come once more to *Irenæus*; for you have not done with him yet. ¹ Forgery, you say, has been actually charged upon *Justin*, [by *John Croius* and *Dr. Middleton*] and may with equal reason be charged on *Irenæus*. For what other account can be given, of his frequent appeals to apostolical tradition, for the support of so many incredible doctrines? Why, this very natural one, that in non-essential points, he too easily followed the authority of *Papias*, a weak man, who on slight grounds believed many trifling things to have been said or done by the apostles. And allowing all this, yet it does not give us so ¹ lamentable

an idea, of those primitive ages and primitive champions of the Christian cause.

The same account may be given of his mistake, 'concerning the age of our Lord. There is therefore as yet neither reason nor any plausible pretence for laying forgery to his charge. And consequently, thus far his credit, as a witness, stands clear and unimpeach'd.

But you say, secondly, ' *He was a zealous asserter of tradition.* He might be so, and yet be an honest man: And that, whether he was mistaken or no, in ' supposing *Papias* to have been a disciple of *John* the apostle.

You say, thirdly, He supposed ' *that the disciples of Simon Magus, as well as of Carpocrates, used magical*

² *ibid.*

³ p. 61.

⁴ p. 64.

⁵ p. 68.

arts : That "the dead were frequently raised in his time : That "the Jews by the name of G O D cast out devils : And that many had even then the gift of tongues, although he had it not himself. This is the whole of your charge against St. Irenæus, when summ'd up and laid together. And now let any reasonable person judge, whether all this gives us the least cause to question, either his having sense enough to discern a plain matter of fact, or honesty enough, to relate it. Here then is one more credible witness, of miraculous gifts after the days of the apostles.

18. What you advance concerning the history of tradition, I am neither concern'd to defend nor to confute. Only I must observe, you forgot yourself again ^w where you say, *The fable of the Millennium, of the old age of Christ, with many more,*

^u p. 72.

^w p. 85.

^x p. 64.

were

were all embraced by the earliest fathers. For modesty sake, Sir, think a little before you speak, and remember, you yourself inform'd us, That one of these was never embraced at all, but by one single father only.

19. ¹ I cannot, you say, dismiss this article, without taking notice, That witchcraft was universally believ'd through all ages of the primitive church. This you shew by citations from several of the fathers: Who likewise believed, as you inform us, That ² evil spirits had power frequently to afflict either the bodies or minds of men: That they acted the parts of the heathen gods, and assumed the forms of those who were called from the dead. Now this opinion, say you, is not only a proof of the grossest credulity, but of that species of it, which, of all others, lays a man the most open to imposture.

¹ p. 66.

² p. 70.

And yet this opinion, as you know full well, has its foundation, not only in the histories of all ages, and all nations throughout the habitable world, even where Christianity never obtained: But particularly in Scripture; in abundance of passages both of the Old and New Testament: As where the *Israelites* were ^a expressly commanded, not to *suffer a witch to live*; ^b where St. *Paul* numbers *witchcraft* with *the works of the flesh*, and ranks it with adultery and idolatry: And ^c where St. *John* declares, *without are sorcerers and whoremongers and murderers*.

That *the gods of the heathens are devils*, is declared in terms, by one of those who are styled inspired writers. And many conceive, that another of them gives us a ^d plain instance, of their *assuming the form of those who were called from the dead*.

^a — —
^e *1 Cor.*

^b *Gal. v. 19, 20.*

^f *1 Sam. xxviii. 13, 14.*

^c *Rev. xxii. 15.*

Of the power of evil spirits to afflict the minds of men, none can doubt who believe there are any such beings. And of their power to afflict the body, we have abundant proof both in the history of *Job*, and that of the Gospel demoniacks.

I do not mean, Sir, to accuse *you*, of believing these things : You have shewn, that you are guiltless in this matter; and that you pay no more regard to that antiquated book, the Bible, than you do to the second book of *Esdras*. But, alas ! The fathers were not so far enlighten'd. And because they were bigotted to that old book, they of consequence held for truth what, you assure us, was mere delusion and imposture.

20. Now, to apply. " *A mind, you say, so totally posseſt by ſuperſtitious fancies, could not even ſuspect the*

pretensions of those vagrant jugglers, who in those primitive ages, were so numerous and so industriously employed, in deluding their fellow creatures. Both Heathens, Jews, and Christians are all allowed to have had such impostors among them. By whom, Sir, is this allowed of the Christians? By whom, but *Celsus*, was it ever affirmed of them? Who informed you of their growing so numerous? And using such *industry* in their employment? To speak the plain truth, your *mind* appears to be *so totally posseſt* by these vagrant jugglers, that you cannot say one word about the primitive church, but they immediately start up before you; though there is no more proof of their ever existing, than of a witch's sailing in an egg-shell.

21. You conclude this head;
When pious Christians are arrived to

ibid.

this

this pitch of credulity, as to believe that evil spirits or evil men can work miracles in opposition to the gospel; their very piety will oblige them to admit as miraculous, whatever is pretended to be wrought in defence of it. Once more you have spoke out: You have shewn without disguise, what you think of St. Paul and the ¹ lying miracles, which he (poor man!) believed evil spirits or evil men, could work, in opposition to the Gospel; and of St. John, talking so idly of him who ² doeth great wonders, and deceiveth them that dwell on the earth (even though they were not Christians) by means of those miracles which he bath power, to do.

22. You have now finished the third thing you proposed, which was, *To shew the particular characters of the several fathers, who attest that they were eye- and ear-witnesses of*

¹ 2 Thes. ii. 9. ² Rev. xiii. 13, 14.

the extraordinary gifts in the primitive church.

You named-nine of these, *Justin Martyr, Irenæus, Theophilus, Tertullian, Minutius Felix, Origen, Cyprian, Arnobius, and Lactantius*; at the same time observing, that many other writers attest the same thing.

But let the others stand by. Are these good men and true? That is the present question.

You say, No. And to prove, that these *Nine* are knaves, bring several charges against *Two* of them.

These have been answered at large; some of them proved to be false: Some, though true, yet not invalidating their evidence.

But supposing we wave the evidence of these two, here are seven more still to come.

O! but

O! but you say, “If there were twice seven, they only repeat the words which these have taught them.”

You say, But how often must you be reminded, That saying and proving are two things? I grant, in three or four opinions, some (though not all) of these were mistaken, as well as those two. But this by no means proves, that they were all knaves together: Or that if *Justin Martyr* or *Irenæus* speaks wrong, I am therefore to give no credit to the evidence of *Theophilus*, or *Minatius Felix*.

23. You have therefore made a more lame piece of work on this head, (if possible) than on the preceding. You have promised great things, and performed just nothing. You have left above three parts in four of your work, intirely untouch'd; as these two are not a fourth part even of the writers you had named, as attesting

testing the continuance of the extraordinary gifts, after the age of the apostles.

But you have taught that trick at least to your *vagrant jugglers*, to supply the defect of all other arguments. At every dead lift, you are sure to play upon us, these dear creatures of your own imagination. They are the very strength of your battle, your tenth legion. Yet if a man impertinently calls for proof of their existence, if he comes close and engages them hand to hand, they immediately vanish away.

IV. You are, in the fourth place to review all the several kinds of miraculous gifts, which are pretended to have been given; and to observe from the nature of each, how far they may reasonably be suspected.

¹ p. 72.

These,

These, you say, are, 1. The Power of raising the dead, 2. Of healing the sick, 3. Of casting out devils, 4. Of prophesying; and, 5. Of seeing visions, 6. Of discovering the secrets of men, 7. Of expounding the Scriptures, 8. Of speaking with tongues.

I had rather have had an account of the miraculous powers, as they are represented to us in the history of the gospel. But that account you are not inclined to give. So we will make the best of what we have.

Sect. I. 1. And, first, As to raising the dead. Irenæus affirms, ¹This was frequently performed, on necessary occasions; when by great fasting and the joint supplication of the church, the spirit of the dead person returned into him, and the man was given back to the prayers of the saints.

¹ p. 72.

2. But you object, ^m *There is not an instance of this to be found, in the three first centuries.* I presume you mean, no *Heathen* historian has mentioned it (for *Christian* historians were not.) I answer, 1. 'Tis not probable a Heathen historian would have related such a fact, had he known it. 2. 'Tis equally improbable, he should know it: seeing the Christians knew with whom they had to do; and that, had such an instance been made publick, they would not long have enjoyed him who had been *given back to their prayers.* They could not but remember what had been before; when the Jews *sought Lazarus also to kill him:* a very obvious reason why a miracle of this particular kind, ought not to have been published abroad: especially, considering, thirdly, That it was not designed, for the conver-

^m p. 72.

sion of the heathens; but on occasions necessary for the good of the church, of the Christian community. Lastly, It was a miracle proper above all others, to support and confirm the Christians, who were daily tortured and slain, but sustained by the hope of obtaining a better resurrection.

3. You object, secondly, "The heathens constantly affirmed the thing itself to be impossible. They did so. But is it a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?"

4. You object, thirdly, That when *Autolycus*^o, an eminent heathen, scarce forty years after this, said to *Theophilus* bishop of *Antioch*, "Shew me but one raised from the dead, that I may see and believe." *Theophilus* could not. Supposing he could not, I do not see, that this contradicts the testimony of *Irenæus*. For he does

* p. 73. o *ibid.*

not affirm (though you ^o say, he does) That this was *performed*, as it were, in every parish, or place where there was a Christian church. He does not affirm, that it was performed at *Antioch*: probably, not in any church, unless where a concurrence of important circumstances required it. Much less does he affirm, That the persons raised in *France*, would be alive forty years after. Therefore altho' it be granted, 1. That the historians of that age are silent, 2. That the heathens said, the thing was impossible, and, 3. That *Theophilus* did not answer the challenge of the heathen *Autolycus*: all this will not invalidate in any degree, the express testimony of *Irenaeus*, or prove, that none have been raised from the dead, since the days of the apostles.

Sect. II. 1. ^o The next gift is, that of healing the sick; often performed

^o p. 72. ^{p.} p. 75.

by anointing them with oil: in favour of which, as you observe, the antient testimonies are more full and express. But ^a this, you say, might be accounted for without a miracle, by the natural efficacy of the oil itself. I doubt not. Be pleased to try, how many you can cure thus, that are blind, deaf, dumb, or paralytic: and experience, if not philosophy, will teach you, that oil has no such natural efficacy as this.

2. Of this you seem not infensible already, and therefore fly away to your favourite supposition, that "they were not cured at all: that the whole matter was a cheat from the beginning to the end." But by what arguments do you evince this? The first is, "The heathens pretended to do the same. Nay, and managed the imposture with so much art, that the Christians could neither deny nor detect it: but insisted always, that it

^a p. 76. ^b ibid.

was performed by Demons or evil spirits. But still the heathens maintained, The cures, were wrought by their Gods, by Aesculapius in particular. And where is the difference? Seeing, as was observed before, the Gods of the heathens were but devils.

3. But, you say, 'Alio' publick monuments were erected, in proof and memory of these cures, at the time when they were performed, yet it is certain all those heathen miracles were pure forgeries. How is it certain? If you can swallow this without good proof, you are far more credulous than I. I cannot believe, that the whole body of the heathens, for so many generations, were utterly destitute of common sense, any more than of common honesty. Why should you fix such a charge on whole cities and counties? You could

have done no more, if they had been Christians!

4. But *diseases thought fatal and desperate, are oft surprizingly healed of themselves.* And therefore we cannot pay any great regard to such stories, unless we knew more precisely in this case the real bounds between nature and miracle. Sir, I understand you well. The drift of the argument is easily seen. It points at the master as well as his servants: and tends to prove, that, after all this talk about miraculous cures, we are not sure there were ever any in the world. But it will do no harm. For altho' we grant, 1. That some recover, even in seemingly desperate cases, and, 2. That we do not know in any case, *the precise bounds between nature and miracle:* yet it does not follow, therefore I cannot be assured, there ever was a miracle of

¹ p. 79.

H 4

healing

healing in the world. To explain this by an instance. I do not precisely know, how far nature may go, in healing, that is, restoring sight to the blind. Yet this I assuredly know, that if a man born blind, is restored to sight, by a word, this is not nature, but miracle. And to such a story, well attested, all reasonable men will pay the highest regard.

5. The sum of what you have advanced on this head, is, 1. That the heathens themselves had miraculous cures among them; 2. That oil may cure some diseases by its natural efficacy, and, 3. That we do not know the precise bounds of nature. All this I allow. But all this will not prove, that no miraculous cures were performed, either by our Lord and his apostles, or by those who lived in the three succeeding centuries.

Sect,

Sect. III. 1. The third of the miraculous powers said to have been in the primitive church, is that of *casting out devils*. The testimonies concerning this are out of number, and as plain as words can make them. To shew therefore, that all these signify nothing, and that there were never any devils cast out at all (neither by the apostles, nor since the apostles, for the argument proves both or neither) is a task worthy of *you*. And (to give you your just praise) you have here put forth all your strength.

2. And yet I cannot but apprehend, there was a much shorter way. Would it not have been readier, to overthrow all those testimonies at a stroke, by proving, there never was any devil in the world? Then the whole affair of *casting him out* had been at an end.

But

But it is in condescension to the weakness and prejudices of mankind, that you go less out of the common road, and only observe, " That those who were said to be possest of the devil, may have been ill of the falling sickness." And their symptoms, you say, "["] Seem to be nothing else but the ordinary symptoms of an epilepsy.

If it be asked, But were *the speeches and confessions of the devils, and their answering to all questions, nothing but the ordinary symptoms of an epilepsy?* You take in a second hypothesis, and account for these by the arts of imposture and contrivance, between the persons concerned in the act.

But is not this something extraordinary, that men in epileptic fits, should be capable of so much *art and contrivance?* To get over this

["] p. 81. ["] p. 82.

dif-

difficulty, we are to suppose, that art and contrivance were the main ingredients; so that we are to add only *quantum suffici* of the epilepsy, and sometime to leave it out of the composition.

But the proof, Sir, where is the proof? I want a little of that too. Instead of this we have only another supposition, * *That all the fathers were either induced by their prejudices, to give too hasty credit to these pretended possessions, or carried away by their zeal to support a delusion, which was useful to the Christian cause.*

I grant, they were prejudiced in favour of the Bible. But yet we cannot fairly conclude from hence, either that they were one and all continually deceived, by merely *pretended possessions*: or, that they would

all lie for God, a thing absolutely forbidden in that book.

3. But *leaders of sects*, you say, *whatever principles they pretend to, have seldom scrupled to use a commodious lie.* I observe you are quite impartial here. You make no exception of age or nation. 'Tis all one to you, whether your reader applies this, to the son of *Abdalla*, or the son of *Mary*. And yet, Sir, I cannot but think there was a difference. I fancy the *Jew* was an honester man than the *Arabian*: and that tho' *Mahomet* used many a *commodious lie*, yet *Jesus of Nazareth* did not.

4. However, ² *Not one of these fabbers made any scruple of using the hyperbolical style* (that is, in plain English, of lying) *as an eminent writer of ecclesiastical history declares.* You should have said an *impartial*

¹ p. 83. ² *ibid.*

writer.

writer. For who would scruple that character to Mr. *Le Clerc*? And yet I cannot take either his or your bare word for this. Be pleased to produce a little proof. Hitherto you have *proved* absolutely nothing on the head, but (as your manner is) taken all for granted.

5. You next relate that famous story from *Tertullian*. *A woman went to the theatre, and returned possessed with a devil. When the unclean spirit was asked, How he dared to assault a Christian? He answered, I found her on my own ground.* After relating another (which you endeavour to account for naturally) you intimate that this was a mere lie of *Tertullian's*. But how is that proved? Why *Tertullian was an utter enemy to plays and publick shows in the theatre.* He was so. But can we infer from thence, that he was an utter enemy to common honesty?

* p. 83.

6. You

6. You add, ^b *The fathers themselves own, that even the Jews, yea and the Heathen cast out devils.* Now it will be granted, ^c *That these Jewish and Heathen exorcists were mere cheats and impostors.* But the fathers believed, *they really cast them out.* Now if they could take their tricks for the effects of a supernatural power, well might they be deceived by their own impostors. Or, ^d *they might think it convenient to oppose one cheat to another.*

Deceived, say you, by their own impostors? Why I thought they were the very men who set them to work! Who opposed one cheat to another. Apt scholars, who acted their part so well, as even to deceive their masters! But whatever the Heathen were, we cannot grant, that all the Jewish exorcists were impostors. Whe-

^b p. 84.

^c p. 87.

^d p. 88.

ther

ther the Heathens cast out devils or not, 'tis sure the sons of the Jews cast them out. I mean, upon supposition, that Jesus of Nazareth cast them out: which is a point not here to be disputed.

7. But it is very hard to believe what Origen declares, that the devils used to possess and destroy cattle. You might have said, What Matthew and Mark declare, concerning the herd of swine. And yet we shall find you by and by, believing far harder things than this.

Before you subjoined the silly story of *Hilarion* and his camel, you should in candor have informed your reader, that it is disputed, whether the life of *Hilarion* was wrote by St. *Jerom* or no? But be it as it may. I have no concern with either. For they did not live within the three first ages.

8. I know not what you have proved hitherto, tho' you have affirmed many things, and intimated more. But now we come to the strength of the cause, contained in your five observations.

• You observe, first, *That all the primitive accounts of casting out devils, tho' given by different fathers, and in different ages, yet exactly agree, with regard to all the main circumstances.*" And this you apprehend to be a mark of imposture. *It looks, you say, as if they copied from each other!* Now a vulgar reader would have imagined, that any single account of this kind, must be rendered much more (not less) credible, by parallel accounts of what many had severally seen, at different times, and in different places.

9. You observe, secondly, *That the persons thus posseſſed, were called,*

* p. 91. ^t *ibid.*

*Elyas-

'Εγγένειοι, ventriloquists; (some of them were) because they were generally believed, to speak out of the belly. Now⁸ there are at this day, you say, those who by art and practice can speak in the same manner. If we suppose then that there were artists of this kind among the antient Christians, how easily by a correspondence between the ventriloquist and the exorcist, might they delude the most sensible of their audience?

But what did the *ventriloquist* do with his *epilepsy* in the mean time? You must not let it go. Because many of the circumstances wherein all these accounts agree, cannot be tolerably accounted for without it. And yet how will you make these two agree? 'Tis a point worthy your serious consideration.

But cheats doubtless they were,
account for it who can. Yet 'tis

5 p. 92.

I strange,

strange, none of the heathens should find them out: that the imposture should remain quite undiscovered, till fourteen hundred years after the impostors were dust! He must have a very large faith, who can believe this: who can suppose, that not one of all those impostors, should either through inadvertence, or in the midst of tortures and death, have once intimated any such thing.

10. You observe, thirdly, ^h *That many demoniacks could not be cured, by all the power of the exorcists, and that the cures which were pretended to be wrought on any, were but temporary; were but the cessation of a particular fit, or access of the distemper. This, you say, is evident, from the testimony of antiquity itself, and may be clearly collected from the method of treating them in the antient church.*

Sir, you are the most obliging disputant in the world: for you continually answer your own arguments. Your last observation confuted all that you had advanced before. And now you are so kind as to confute that. For if, after all, these demoniacks were real epilepticks, and that in so high a degree, as to be wholly incurable: what becomes of their *art and practice?* and of the very good *correspondence, between the ventriloquist and the exorcist?*

Having allowed you your supposition just so long, as may suffice to confute yourself, I must now observe, it is not true. For all that is evident from the testimony of antiquity is this: that although many demoniacks were wholly delivered, yet some were not, particularly in the third century: but continued months or years, with only intervals of ease,

I 2 before

before they were entirely set at liberty.

11. You observe, fourthly, ¹ That great numbers of demoniacks subsisted in those early ages, whose chief habitation was in a part of the church, where as in a kind of hospital, they were under the care of the exorcists. — ² Which will account for the confidence of those challenges made to the Heathens by the Christians, to come and see how they could drive the devil out of them, while they kept such numbers of them in constant pay: always ready for the show; tried and disciplined by your exorcists to groan and howl, and give proper answers to all questions.

So now the correspondence between the ventriloquist and the exorcist, is grown more close than ever! But the misfortune is, this observation likewise, wholly overthrows

¹ p. 94, ² p. 95.

4 that

that which went before it. For if all the groaning and howling and other symptoms were no more than what they ¹were disciplined to by their exorcists ; then it cannot be, that many ^m of them could not possibly be cured, by all the power of those exorcists. What could they not possibly be taught to know their masters ? And, when to end as well as when to begin the show ? One would think, that the cures wrought upon these might have been more than temporary. Nay, 'tis surprizing, that, while they had such numbers of them, they should ever suffer the same person to shew twice.

12. You observe, fifthly, ^aThat whereas this power of casting out devils, had hitherto been in the hands only of the meaner part of the laity : (that wants proof :) it was, about the year 367, put under the direction of

¹ p. 95. ^m p. 92. ^a p. 95.

the clergy; it being then decreed by the council of Laodicea, that none should be exorcists but those appointed (or ordained) by the bishop. But no sooner was this done, even by those who favoured and desired to support it, than the gift itself gradually decreased and expired.

You here overthrow not only your immediately preceding observation (as usual) but likewise what you had observed elsewhere, “^o That the exorcists began to be ordained, *about the middle of the third century.*” If so, what need of decreeing it now, above an hundred years after? Again, if the exorcists were ordained an hundred years before this council sat, what change was made by the decree of the council? Or how came the power of casting out devils to cease upon it? You say, the bishops still favoured and desired to support

: p. 86.

it.

it. Why then did they not support it? It must have been they (not the poor exorcists, who were but a degree above sextons) who had hitherto *kept such numbers of them in pay*. What was become of them now? Were all the groaners and howlers dead? And no more to be procured for money? Or rather, did not the bishops, think you, grow covetous as they grew rich; and so *keep* fewer and fewer of them *in pay*, till at length the whole business dropped?

13. These are your laboured objections against the great promise of our Lord, *In my name shall they cast out devils*: whereby (to make sure work) you strike at him and his apostles, just as much as at the primitive fathers. But by a strange jumble of ideas in your head, you would prove so much that you prove nothing. By attempting to shew, all who claimed this power, to be

at once both fools and knaves, you have spoil'd your whole cause, and, in the event, neither shewn them to be one nor the other : As the one half of your argument all along, just serves to overthrow the other. So that after all, the antient testimonies touching this gift, remain firm and unshaken,

Sect. IV. 1. You told us above, *That the fourth miraculous gift was that of prophesying, the fifth, of seeing visions, the sixth, of discovering the secrets of men.* But here you jumble them all together, telling us, *The next miraculous gift is that of prophetic visions, and extatic trances, (extatic ecstasies you might have said) and the discovery of mens hearts.* But why do you thrust all three into one? Because, you say, *these seem to be the fruit of one spirit.* Most certainly

1 p. 72.

2 p. 96.

they

they are, whether it was the spirit of truth, or (as you suppose) the spirit of delusion.

2. However it is the second of these on which you chiefly dwell, (the fifth of those you before enumerated) taking but little notice of the fourth, *Foretelling things to come*, and none at all of the sixth, *discovering the secrets of men*. The testimonies therefore for these remain in full force, as you do not even attempt to invalidate them. With regard to *visions* or *extasies*, you observe first, That *Tertullian* calls *Extasy*, 'a temporary loss of senses. It was so; of the outward senses, which were then lock'd up. You observe, secondly, That *Suidas* (a very primitive writer, who lived between eight and nine hundred years after *Tertullian*) says, That of all the kinds of madness, that of the poets and prophets, was alone

to be wish'd for. I am at a loss to know, what this is brought to prove. The question is, were there visions in the primitive church? You observe, Thirdly, That *Philo the Jew* says (I literally translate his words; which you do not; for it would not answer your purpose) *'When the divine light shines, the human sets: But when that sets, this rises. This uses to befall the prophets.'* Well, Sir, and what is this to the question? Why, from these testimonies, you say, we may collect, that the vision or extasy of the primitive church, was of the same kind with that of the Delphic Pythia, or the Cumæan Sibyl.

Well collected indeed! But I desire a little better testimony, than either that of *Philo the Jew*, or *Suidas*, a Lexicographer of the eleventh century, before I believe this. How little *Tertullian* is to be regarded on this

head, you yourself shew in the very next page.

3. You say, Fourthly, *Montanus and his associates were the authors of these trances. They first raised this spirit of Enthusiasm in the church, and acquired great credit by their visions and extasies.* Sir, you forget; they did not raise this spirit, but rather *Joel and St. Peter*: According to whose words, the young men saw visions, before *Montanus* was born.

You observe, Fifthly, How *"Tertullian was imposed upon, by the craft of extatic visionaries,* and then fall upon *Cyprian* with all your might: Your objections to whom we shall now consider.

And, first, you lay it down as a postulatum, that he was *fond of power and episcopal authority.* I cannot grant this, Sir; I must have some

proof. Else this, and all you infer from it will go for nothing.

You say, secondly, *In all questionable points of doctrine or discipline, which he had a mind to introduce into the Christian worship, we find him constantly appealing to the testimony of visions and divine revelations.* Thus he says to Cæcilius, that he was divinely admonish'd, to mix water with wine in the Sacrament, in order to render it effectual.

You set out unhappily enough. For this can never be a proof of Cyprian's appealing to visions and revelations, in order to introduce questionable points of doctrine or discipline into the Christian worship: Because this point was unquestionable, and could not then be introduced into the Christian worship, having had a constant place therein (as "you your-

¶ *Introd. Disc. p. 57.*

self

self have shew'd) at least from the time of *Justin Martyr*.

Indeed, neither *Justin* nor *Cyprian* use those words, *In order to render it effectual*. They are an ingenious and honest addition of your own, in order to make something out of nothing.

5. I observe you take much the same liberty, in your next quotation from *Cyprian*. * *He threatens, you say, to execute, "What he was ordered to do against them in a vision."* Here also the last words, *in a vision*, are an improvement upon the text. *Cyprian's* words are, † *I will use that admonition, which the Lord commands me to use.* But neither was this, in order to introduce any questionable point, either of doctrine or

* p. 102.

† *Utar eâ admonitione, quâ me Dominus uti jubet;*
Epis. 9.

discipline : No more than his *using the same threat to Pupianus, who had spoken ill of him and left his communion.*

6. You go on. *He says likewise, he was admonish'd of God, to ordain one Numidicus ;^y a confessor, ^z who had been left for dead, half burnt and buried in stones.* True, but what questionable point of doctrine or discipline did he introduce hereby ? Or by ordaining *Celerinus : Who was overruled and compelled by a Divine vision to accept that office.* So you affirm *Cyprian* says. But *Cyprian* says it not : At least, not in those words which you cite in the margin ; which literally translated, run thus, *I recommend to you Celerinus, join'd to our clergy, [†] not by human suffrage, but by the divine favour.*

In another letter, speaking of Aurelius, whom he had ordain'd a reader,

^y p. 103. ^z p. 104.

[†] *Non humanâ suffragatione, sed divina dictatione conjunctum.* Epist. 34.

be

he says to his clergy and people, “ In ordaining clergy, my dearest brethren, I use to consult you first — But there is no need to wait for human testimonies, when the Divine suffrage has been already signified.

An impartial man would wonder what you could infer, from these five passages put together. Why, by the help of that short postulatum, “ He was fond of power” (you have as much ground to say, “ He was fond of bloodshed : ”) you will make it plain, “ This was all a trick, to inlarge his episcopal authority.” But as that postulatum is not allow’d, you have all your work to begin again.

7. Hitherto then the character of Cyprian is unhurt ; but now you are resolved to blow it up at once. So you proceed, ** The most memorable effect of any of his visions, was his flight from his church in the time of persecution.*

^a p. 104.

tion.

tion. * He affirms, that he was commanded to retire, by a special revelation from heaven. Yet this plea was a mere fiction, contrived to quiet the scandal which was raised by his flight: And is confuted by himself, where he declares, it was the advice of Tertullus which prevailed with him to withdraw.

You here charge Cyprian with confuting himself, in saying, He withdrew by the advice of Tertullus: Whereas he had before affirm'd, that he was commanded to retire, by a special revelation from heaven. Indeed he had not: There is no necessity at all for putting this construction upon those words, *The Lord who commanded me to retire:* Which may without any force be understood, of the written command, † *When they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another.* It is

* p. 105.

† Matt. x. 23.

not

not therefore clear, That this plea of a *special revelation* was ever advanced. And if it was advanced, it still remains to be proved, That *it was nothing else but a mere fiction.*

8. Your citing his editor here, obliges me to add a remark, for which you give continual occasion. If either *Rigalt*, Mr. *Dodwell*, Dr. *Grabe*, Mr. *Thirlby*, or any editor of any of the fathers, ever drops an expression to the disadvantage of the author whom he publishes or illustrates, this you account so much treasure, and will surely find a time to expose it to publick view. And all these passages you recite as demonstration. These are doubtless mere oracles: Although when the same person speaks in favour of the father, his authority is not worth a straw. But you have ^b *none of those arts which are commonly employ'd by disputants, to palliate a bad cause!*

^b Pref. p. 31.

K

9. What

9. What you relate of *Dionysius*, bishop of *Alexandria*, you have not from himself, but only from one who lived near an hundred years after *Dionysius* was dead. Therefore he is not at all accountable for it: As neither am I, for any vision of St. *Jerom*. But I am concern'd in the consequence you would draw from it: “ If this was a fiction, so were *Cyprian's* too.” That will not follow. Many objections may lie against the one, which have no place with regard to the other.

10. You now bring forth your grand discovery, that ‘*all the visions of those days, were contrived, or authorized at least, by the leading men of the church*. For they were all applied, either, 1. To excuse the conduct of particular persons, in some instances of it liable to censure, or, 2. To inforce some doctrine or discipline pressed by

some, but not relish'd by others, or,
3. To confirm things not only frivolous,
but sometimes even superstitious and
burlful.

Well, Sir, here is the proposition. But where is the proof? I hope we shall have it in your next *Free Inquiry*: And that you will then give us a few instances of such applications, from the writers of the three first centuries.

11. Being not disposed to do this at present, you fall again upon the poor heretic *Montanus*: who ^d first gave a vogue (as you phrase it) to visions and extasies in the Christian church. So you told us before. But we cannot believe it yet; because *Peter* and *Paul* tell us the contrary.

Indeed you do not now mention *Montanus*, because it is any thing to the question, but only to make way

^d p. 110.

for observing, That those who wrote against him, employed such arguments against his prophecy, as shake the credit of all prophecy. For Epiphanius makes this the very criterion, between a true and a false prophet, "That the true had no extasies, constantly restrain'd his senses, and with firmness of mind apprehended and uttered the divine oracles." Sir, have you not mistook? Have you not transcribed one sentence in the margin, and translated another? That sentence which stands in your margin is this: *When there was need, the saints of God among the prophets prophesied all things, with the true spirit, and with a sound understanding and reasonable mind.* Now it is difficult to find out, how this comes to shake the credit of all prophecy.

12. Why thus. ^c Before the Monianists had brought those extasies into disgrace, the prophecy of the orthodox

^c p. 111.

too, was exerted in *extasy*. And so were the prophecies of the Old Testament, according to the current opinion in those earlier days.

That this was then the *current opinion*, you bring three citations to prove. But if you could cite three fathers more, during the three first centuries, *expressly affirming*, that the prophets were all out of their senses, I would not take their word. For though I take most of the fathers to have been wise and good men, yet I know none of them were infallible. But do even these three *expressly affirm it*? No; not one of them, at least in the words you have cited. From *Athenagoras* you cite only part of a sentence, which translated as literally as it will well bear, runs thus: *Who in an extasy of their own thoughts, being moved by the Divine Spirit, spoke the things with which they were inspired, even as a piper breathes into*

a pipe. Does *Athenagoras* expressly affirm in these words, that the prophets were *transported out of their senses*? I hope, Sir, you do not understand *Greek*. If so, you shew here only a little harmless ignorance.

13. From *Justin Martyr* also you cite but part of a sentence. He speaks (very nearly) thus:

That the Spirit of God descending from heaven, and using righteous men, as the quill strikes the harp or lyre, may reveal unto us the knowledge of divine and heavenly things. And does *Justin* expressly affirm in these words, that all the prophets were *transported out of their senses*?

Tertullian's words are, *A man being in the spirit, especially when he beholds the glory of God, must needs lose sense.* Now as it is not plain,

² *Necesse est, excidat sensu.*

that

that he means hereby, lose his understanding (it being at least equally probable, that he intends no more than losing for the time the use of his outward senses) neither can it be said, that *Tertullian* expressly affirms, *The prophets were all out of their senses*. Therefore you have not so much as one father to vouch for what you say was *the current opinion in those days*.

14. I doubt not but all men of learning will observe a circumstance, which holds throughout all your quotations. The strength of your argument constantly lies in a loose and paraphrastical manner of translating. The strength of mine lies in translating all in the most close and literal manner: so that closeness of translation strengthens mine in the same proportion as it weakens your arguments: a plain proof of what you elsewhere observe, That

you use ¹ no subtle refinements or forced constructions.

15. But to return to *Cyprian*. I ^b cannot forbear, you say, relating two or three more of his wonderful stories. The first is, ^c A man who had denied Christ, was presently struck dumb: the second, A woman who had done so, was seized by an unclean spirit, and soon after died in great anguish: the third, of which he says he was an eye-witness, is this: the Heathen magistrates gave to a Christian infant, part of what had been offered to an idol. When the deacon forced the consecrated wine on this child, it was immediately seized with convulsions and vomiting: as was a woman who had apostatized, upon taking the consecrated elements. The other two relations *Cyprian* does not affirm of his own personal knowledge.

^a Pref. p. 31.

^b p. 112.

^c p. 113.

Now

^h Now what can we think, say you, of these strange stories, but that they were partly forged, partly drest up in this tragical form, to support the discipline of the church, in these times of danger and trial?

Why, many will think, that some of them are true, even in the manner they are related: and that if any of them are not, *Cyprian* thought they were, and related them in the sincerity of his heart. Nay perhaps some will think, that the wisdom of God might, *in those times of danger and trial*, work things of this kind, for that very end, *to support the discipline of the church*. And till you shew the falsehood, or at least the improbability of this, *Cyprian's* character stands untainted: not only as a man of sense (which you yourself allow) but likewise of eminent integrity: and consequently, it is beyond

dispute, that *visions*, the fifth miraculous gift, remained in the church after the days of the apostles.

Sect. V. 1. The sixth of the miraculous gifts which you enumerated above, namely, *the discernment of spirits*, you just name, and then entirely pass over. ¹ The seventh is, that of *expounded the Scriptures*. You tack to it, or *the mysteries of God*. But inasmuch as it is not yet agreed (as was intimated above) whether this be the same gift, it may just as well be left out.

2. Now as to this, you say, *There is no trace of it to be found, since the days of the apostles. For even in the second and third centuries, a most senseless and extravagant method of expounding them prevailed. For which when we censure any particular father, his apologists with one voice alledge, "This is to be charged to the*

*age wherein he lived, which could not
relish or endure any better."*

I doubt much, whether you can produce one single apologist for any ridiculous comment on sacred writ, who any where alledges, that the second or third century could not relish or endure any better. But if they were all to say this with one voice, yet no reasonable man could believe them. For it is notoriously contrary to matter of fact. It may be allowed, that some of these fathers, being afraid of too literal a way of expounding the Scriptures, leaned sometimes to the other extreme. Yet nothing can be more unjust than to infer from hence, *That the age in which they lived, could not relish or endure any but senseless, extravagant, enthusiastic, ridiculous comments on sacred writ.*

Will you say, That all the comments on Scripture, still to be found,

in the writings of *Ignatius, Polycarp, Athenagoras, or even of Origen and Clemens Alexandrinus*, are senseless and extravagant? If not, this charge must fall to the ground: It being manifest, that even *the age, in which they lived*, could both *endure and relish* sound, sensible, rational (and yet spiritual) comments on holy writ.

Yet this extravagant charge, you have repeated over and over, in various parts of your work; thrusting it upon your reader in season, and out of season. How fairly, let all candid men judge.

3. Touching the miraculous gift of expounding Scripture, you say, *Justin Martyr^k affirms, it was conferred on him by the special grace of God.* I cannot find, where he affirms this. Not in the words you cite, which literally translated (as was observed before) run thus: *He hath*

^k p. 117.

revealed to us whatsoever things we have understood by his grace from the Scriptures also. You seem conscious, these words do not prove the point, and therefore eke them out with those of Monsieur *Tillemont*. But his own words, and no other will satisfy me. I cannot believe it, unless from his own mouth.

4. Meantime I cannot but observe an odd circumstance, that you are here, in the abundance of your strength, confuting a proposition, which (whether it be true or false) not one of your antagonists affirms. You are labouring to prove, "There was not in the primitive church any such miraculous gift as that of expounding the Scriptures." Pray, Sir, who says, there was? Not *Justin Martyr*: not one among all those fathers, whom you have quoted as witnesses of the miraculous gifts, from the tenth to the eighteenth page
of

of your *Inquiry*. If you think they do, I am ready to follow you, step by step, through every quotation you have made.

5. No, nor is this mentioned in any enumeration of the miraculous gifts, which I can find in the holy Scriptures. Prophesy indeed is mentioned more than once, by the apostles, as well as the fathers. But the context shews, where it is promised as a miraculous gift, it means, the foretelling things to come. All therefore which you say on this head, is a mere *Ignoratio elenchi*, a mistake of the question to be proved.

Sect. VI. 1. ^m The eighth and last of the miraculous gifts you enumerated, was, *the gift of tongues*. And this, 'tis sure, was claimed by the primitive Christians; for *Irenæus* says expressly, *We hear many in the church, speaking with all kinds of tongues.*

^m p. 119.

And

And yet, you say, this was granted only on certain special occasions, and then withdrawn again from the apostles themselves: so that in the ordinary course of their ministry, they were generally destitute of it. This, you say, I have shewn elsewhere. I presume, in some treatise which I have not seen.

2. But *Irenæus*, who declares, that many had this gift in his days, yet owns, he had it not himself. This is only a proof, that the case was then the same, as when St. Paul observed long before, "Are all workers of miracles? Have all the gifts of healings? Do all speak with tongues? No, not even when those gifts were shed abroad; in the most abundant manner.

3. ° But no other father has made the least claim to it. Perhaps none of those whose writings are now ex-

tant: at least, not in those writings which are extant. But what are these in comparison of those which are lost? And how many were burning and shining lights, within three hundred years after Christ, who wrote no account of themselves at all; at least none which has come to our hands? But who are they that *speak of it as a gift, peculiar to the times of the apostles?* You say, *There is not a single father who ventures to speak of it in any other manner.* Well, bring but six *Antenicene* fathers, who speak of it in this manner, and I will give up the whole point.

4. ⁴But you say, *After the apostolic times, there is not in all history one instance, even so much as mentioned, of any particular person who ever exercised this gift.* You must mean, either that the Heathens have mentioned no instance of this kind, (which

³ *ibid.*

⁴ *ibid.*

is not at all surprising) or that *Irenæus* does not mention the names of those many persons who in his time exercised this gift. And this also may be allowed without affecting in any wise the credibility of his testimony concerning them.

5. I must take notice here of another of your postulatum, which leads you into many mistakes. With regard to past ages, you continually take this for granted, *What is not recorded was not done*. But this is by no means a self-evident axiom. Nay, possibly it is not true. For there may be many reasons in the depth of the wisdom of GOD, for his doing many things at various times and places, either by his natural or supernatural power, which were never recorded at all. And abundantly more were recorded once, and that with the fullest evidence, whereof nevertheless we

L

find

find no certain evidence now, at the distance of fourteen hundred years.

6. Perhaps this may obtain in the very case before us. Many may have spoken with new tongues, of whom this is not recorded: At least the records are lost, in a course of so many hundred years. Nay, it is not only possible that it may be so, but it is absolutely certain that it is so. And you yourself must acknowledge it. For *you* acknowledge, that the apostles, when in strange countries, spoke with strange tongues: That *St. John*, for instance, when in *Asia Minor*, *St. Peter*, when in *Italy* (if he was really there) and the other apostles, when in other countries, in *Parthia*, *Media*, *Pbrygia*, *Pamphylia*, spoke each to the natives of each in their own tongues, the wonderful works of God. And yet there is no authentick record of this: *There is*

is not in all history, one well-attested instance of any particular apostle's exercising this gift in any country whatsoever. Now, Sir, if your axiom were allowed, what would be the consequence? Even that the apostles themselves no more spoke with tongues than any of their successors.

7. I need therefore take no trouble about your subsequent reasonings, seeing they are built on such a foundation. Only I must observe an historical mistake which occurs toward the bottom of your next page. Since the reformation, you say, ^h *this gift has never once been heard of, or pretended to by the Romanists themselves.* But has it been *pretended to* (whether justly or not) by no others, though not by the *Romanists*? Has it *never once been heard of* since that time? Sir,

^h p. 122.

your memory fails you again. It has undoubtedly been *pretended* to, and that at no great distance either from our time or country. It has been *heard of* more than *once*, no farther off than the valleys of *Dauphiny*. Nor is it yet fifty years ago, since the *Protestant* inhabitants of those valleys so loudly *pretended* to this and other miraculous powers, as to give much disturbance to *Paris* itself. And how did the king of *France* confute that pretence, and prevent its being heard any more? Not by the pen of his scholars, but by (a truly heathen way) the swords and bayonets of his dragoons.

8. You close this head with a very extraordinary thought. ¹ *The gift of tongues may, you say, be considered, as a proper test or criterion for determining the miraculous pretensions of all churches. If among their extraordi-*

¹ *ibid.*

nary

nary gifts they cannot shew us this, they have none to shew which are genuine.

Now I really thought, it had been otherwise. I thought it had been an adjudg'd rule in the case, *All these worketh one and the self-same spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will.* And as to every man, so to every church, every collective body of men. But if this be so, then yours is no proper test, for determining the pretensions of all churches: Seeing he who worketh as he will, may (with your good leave) give the gift of tongues, where he gives no other: And may see abundant reasons so to do, whether you and I see them or not. For perhaps we have not always known the mind of the Lord; not being of the number of his counsellours. On the other hand, he may see good to give many other gifts, where it is not his will to bestow this.

Particularly where it would be of no use: As in a church where all are of one mind, and all speak the same language.

9. You have now finish'd (after a fashion) what you proposed to do in the fourth place, which was, *To review all the several kinds of miraculous gifts, which are pretended to have been in the primitive church.* Indeed, you have drop'd one or two of them by the way; against the rest you have brought forth your strong reasons. Those reasons have been coolly examined. And now let every impartial man, every person of true and unbiassed reason, calmly consider and judge, whether you have made out one point of all that you took in hand? And whether some miracles of each kind may not have been wrought in the antient church, for any thing you have advanced to the contrary?

10. From the 127th to the 158th page, you relate miracles said to be wrought in the fourth century. I have no concern with these: But I must weigh an argument which you intermix therewith again and again. It is in substance this: "If we cannot believe the miracles, attested by the later fathers, then we ought not to believe those which are attested by the earliest writers of the church." I answer, The consequence is not good; because the case is not the same with the one and with the other. Several objections, which do not hold with regard to the earlier, may lie against the later miracles: ^k Drawn either from the *improbability of the facts* themselves, such as we have no precedent of in Holy Writ; from the *incompetency of the instruments* said to perform them, such as bones, reliques, or departed saints; or from

^k p. 145.

the gross credulity of a prejudiced, or the dishonesty of an interested narrator.

11. One of these objections holds against most of the later (though not the earlier) miracles. And if only one holds, it is enough ; it is ground sufficient for making the difference. If therefore it was true, that there was ¹ not a single father of the fourth age, who was not equally pious with the best of the more ancient, still we might consistently reject most of the miracles of the fourth, while we allowed those of the preceding ages ; both because of the far greater improbability of the facts themselves, and because of the incompetency of the instruments.

But it is not true, that *the fathers of the fourth age, whom you mention,*

¹ p. 159.

were equally pious with the best of the preceding ages. Nay, according to your account, (which I shall not now contest) they were not pious at all. For you say, "They were wilfull, habitual liars." And if so, they had not a grain of piety. Now that the earlier fathers were not such, has been shewn at large (though indeed *you* complimented them with the same character.) Consequently, whether these later fathers are to be believed or no, we may safely believe the former; who dared not to do evil that good might come, or to lie either for God or man.

12. I had not intended to say any thing more, concerning any of the miracles of the later ages. But your way of accounting for one, said to have been wrought in the fifth, is so extremely curious that I cannot pass it by.

The

The story, it seems, is this ^m “*Huneric*, an *Arian* prince, in his persecution of the orthodox in *Africk*, ordered the tongues of a certain society of them to be cut out by the roots. But by a surprising instance of God’s good providence, they were enabled to speak articulately and distinctly, without their tongues. And so continuing to make open profession of the same doctrine, they became not only preachers, but living witnesses of its truth.”

Don’t mistake me, Sir. I have no design at all to vouch for the truth of this miracle. I leave it just as I find it. But what I am concern’d with is, your manner of accounting for it.

^m p. 182.

13. And

13. And, first, you say, [“]*It may not improbably be supposed, that though their tongues were ordered to be cut to the roots, yet the sentence might not be so strictly executed, as not to leave in some of them such a share of that organ as was sufficient, in a tolerable degree, for the use of speech.*

So you think, Sir, if only an inch of a man’s tongue were to be neatly taken off, he would be able to talk tolerably well, as soon as the operation was over.

But the most marvellous part is still behind. For you add, [“]*To come more close to the point. If we should allow that the tongues of these confessors were cut away to the very roots, what will the learned Doctor say, if this boasted miracle should be found at last to be no miracle at all?*

[“] p. 183. [“] p. 184.

Say?

Say ? Why, that you have more skill than all the *strolling wonder-workers* of the three first centuries put together.

But to the point. Let us see how you will set about it. Why thus : *The tongue* (as you justly, though keenly observe) *has generally been considered as absolutely necessary to the use of speech.* So that to hear men talk without it, might easily pass for a miracle in that credulous age. Yet there was always room to doubt, whether there was any thing miraculous in it or not. But we have an instance in the present century, which clears up all our doubts, and intirely decides the question. I mean, the case of a girl born without a tongue, who talked as easily and distinctly as if she had had one : an account of which is given in the *Memoirs of the Academy of sciences at Paris.*

* p. 184.

14. And

14. And can you really believe this? That a girl *spoke distinctly and easily*, without any tongue at all? And after avowing this belief, do you gravely talk of other mens credulity? I wonder that such a volunteer in faith should stagger at any thing. Doubtless, were it related as natural only, not miraculous, you could believe, that a man might see without eyes.

Surely there is something very peculiar in this; something extraordinary, though not miraculous: that a man, who is too wise to believe the Bible, should believe every thing but the Bible! Should swallow any tale, so God be out of the question, though ever so improbable, ever so impossible.

15. *I have now, you say, thrown together all which I had collected for*

P. 187.

the

the support of my argument: after a lame recapitulation of which, you add with an air of triumph and satisfaction, ' *I wish the fathers, the ablest advocates which popery itself can afford*: for *Protestantism*, I am sure, *can supply none*, whom they would chuse to retain in their cause: *none who can defend them without contradicting their own profession, and disgracing their own character*: or produce any thing, but what deserves to be laughed at, rather than answered.

Might it not be well, Sir, not to be quite so *sure* yet? You may not always have the laugh on your side. You are not yet infallibly assured, but that even *Protestantism* may produce something worth an answer. There may be some *Protestants*, for ought you know, who have a few grains of common sense left, and may find a way to *defend*, at least

* p. 188. * p. 189.

the

the Antenicene fathers, without disgracing their own character. Even such an one as I have faintly attempted this: although I neither have, nor expect to have any preferment: not even to be a *Lambeth Chaplain*: — which if Dr. Middleton is not, 'tis not his own fault.

V. 1. The last thing you proposed was, *To refute some of the most plausible objections, which have been hitherto made.* To what you have offered on this head, I must likewise attempt a short reply.

You say, " *It is objected, first, That by the character I have given of the fathers, the authority of the books of the New Testament, which were transmitted to us through their hands, will be rendered precarious and uncertain.*

After a feint of confuting it, you frankly acknowledge the whole of

this objection. "I may venture, you say, to declare, that, if this objection be true, it cannot hurt my argument. For if it be natural and necessary, that the craft and credulity of witnesses should always detract from the credit of their testimony; then who can help it? And if this charge be proved on the fathers, it must be admitted, how far soever the consequences may reach.

" If it be proved" — Very true. If that charge against the fathers were really and substantially proved, the authority of the New Testament would be at an end, so far as it depends on one kind of evidence. But that charge is not proved. Therefore even the traditional authority of the New Testament is as firm as ever.

2. It is objected, you say, secondly, " " That all suspicion of fraud, in

["] p. 192. ["] p. 193.

the case of the primitive miracles is excluded by that public appeal and challenge which the Christian apologists make to their enemies the Heathens, to come and see with their own eyes, the reality of the facts which they attest."

You answer, *This objection has no real weight with any who are acquainted with the condition of the Christians in those days.* You then inlarge^x (as it seems, with a peculiar pleasure) on the general contempt and odium they lay under, from the first appearance of christianity in the world, till it was established by the civil power.

^y *In these circumstances, it cannot be imagined, you say, that men of figure and fortune would pay any attention to the apologies or writings of a sect, so utterly despised. But, Sir, they were hated as well as despised;* and

^x p. 194, 195, 196.

^y p. 197.

that by the great vulgar, as well as the small. And this very hatred would naturally prompt them to examine the ground of the challenges daily repeated by them they hated: were it only, that by discovering the fraud (which they wanted neither opportunity nor skill to do, had there been any) they might have had a better pretence for throwing *the Christians to the lions*, than because the *Nile* did not, or the *Tiber* did overflow.

3. You add, *Much less can we believe, that the emperor or senate of Rome, should take any notice of those apologies, or even know indeed, that any such were addressed to them.*

Why, Sir, by *your* account, you would make us believe, that all the emperors and senate together, were as *senseless, stupid a race of blockheads and brutes*, as even the Christians themselves.

But hold. You are going to prove it too. *For, say you, should the like case happen now, that any Methodist, Moravian, or French prophet [right skilfully put together] should publish an apology for his brethren, address'd to the king and parliament: is it not wholly improbable, that the government would pay any regard to it?* You should add (to make the parallel complete) *or know that any such was address'd to them.*

No. I conceive, the improbability supposed lies wholly on the other side. Whatever the government of heathen *Rome* was (which I presume you will not deprecate) the government of *England* is remarkable for tenderness to the very meanest subject. It is therefore not improbable in the least, that an address from some thousands of those subjects, how contemptible soever they were generally esteemed, would not be totally dis-

regarded by such a government. But that they should *not know that any such had been addressed to them*, is not only improbable, but morally impossible.

If therefore it were possible for the Heathens to *have a worse opinion of the ancient Christians, than we, you say, have of our modern fanatics*, still it is utterly incredible, that the *Roman government should not only take no notice of their apologies, but not even know that any such were addressed to them.*

4. “ ^aBut the publishing books was more expensive then, than it is now. And therefore we cannot think the Christians of those days, were ^bable to provide such a number of them, as was sufficient for the information of the publick.”

Nay, if they were not able to provide themselves food and rayment,

^a p. 198. ^b p. 199.

they

they would be sure to provide a sufficient number of these: sufficient at least for the information of the emperor and senate, to whom those apologies were addrest. And how great a number, do you suppose, might suffice for them? How many hundred or thousand copies? I apprehend, the emperor would be content with one. And one more would be needful for the senate. Now I really believe, the Christians of those days were able to provide both these copies. Nay, and even two more; if it should have fallen out, that two or three emperors were on the throne: even though we should suppose, that in *Tertullian's* time there were but forty thousand of them in all *Rome*.

5. However, you plunge on: *“since then the Christians were not able to bear the expence of copying them [whether the Heathens were disposed to*

^c p. 199.

buy them or no, is at present out of the question] there is great reason to believe, that their apologies, how grave-ly soever address'd to emperors and senates, lay unknown for many years. There is no great reason to believe it, from any thing you have advanced yet. You add, *especially when the publishing of them was not only ex-pensive, but so criminal also, as to ex-pose them often to danger, and even to capital punishment.*

In very deed, Sir, I am sometimes inclined to suspect, that you are your-self related to certain antient fathers (notwithstanding the learned quo-tations which adorn your margin) who used to say, *Græcum est: non potest legi.* You lay me under an almost invincible temptation to think so, upon this very occasion. For what could induce you, if you knew what he said, to place at the bottom of this very page, a passage from one of

of those apologists, *Justin Martyr*, which so clearly confutes your own argument ? The words are, † *Altho' death be determined against those who teach, or even confess the name of Christ, we both embrace and teach it every where. And if you also receive these words as enemies, you can do no more than kill us.* Could danger then, or the fear of capital punishment restrain those Christians from presenting these apologies ? No ; capital punishment was no terror to them, who daily offer'd themselves to the flames : till the very heathen butchers themselves were tired with slaughtering them.

There can therefore no shadow of doubt remain, with any cool and im-

† Καίπερ θανάτῳ ὀρισθέντῳ κατὰ τῶν διδασκότων, ἡ ὅλως ὁμολογέντων τὸ ὄνομα τῆς Χριστῆς, ἡμεῖς πανταχοῦ καὶ αἰσπαλόμεθα καὶ διδάσκομεν. Εἰ δὲ καὶ ὑμεῖς ὡς ἔχθροι ἐντέυξεσθε τοῖςδε τοῖς λόγοις, καὶ πλέον τὸ δύνασθε τῆς φονεύειν. *Just. Mart. Apol. i. p. 69.*

partial man, but that these apologies were presented to the most eminent heathens, to the magistrates, the senate, the emperors. Nor consequently is there the least room to doubt of the truth of the facts therein asserted : seeing the apologists constantly desired their enemies, *to come and see them with their own eyes*: A hazard which those *crafty men* would never have run, had not the facts themselves been infallibly certain. This objection then stands against you in full force. For such a publick appeal to their bitterest enemies must *exclude all reasonable suspicion of fraud, in the case of the primitive miracles.*

6. You tell us, it is objected, thirdly, *'That no suspicion of fraud can reasonably be entertain'd against those who exposed themselves even to mar-*

tyrdom, in confirmation of the truth of what they taught.

In order to invalidate this objection, you assert, “^f That some of the primitive Christians might expose themselves to martyrdom, out of mere obstinacy; others, ^g from a desire of glory; ^h others from a fear of reproach; but the most of all, ⁱ from the hope of a higher reward in heaven; especially, as they believed, ^k the end of the world was near, and ^l that the martyrs felt no pain in death.” *All^m which topicks, you say, when display’d with art, were sufficient to inflame the multitude to embrace any martyrdom.*

This appears very plausible in speculation. But fact and experience will not answer. You are an eloquent man, and are able to display any topic you please, with art enough.

^f p. 200. ^g p. 201. ^h p. 208. ⁱ p. 202.
^k p. 203. ^l p. 204. ^m p. 298.

Yet

Yet if you was to try, with all that art and eloquence, to persuade by all these topics, not a whole multitude, but one simple credulous ploughman, to go and be shot thro' the head ; I am afraid, you would scarce prevail with him after all, to embrace even that easy martyrdom. And it might be more difficult still to find a man, who either out of obstinacy, fear of shame, or desire of glory, would calmly and deliberately offer himself to be roasted alive in *Smithfield*.

7. Have you considered, Sir, how the case stood in our own country, scarce two hundred years ago? Not a multitude indeed, and yet not a few, of our own countrymen then expired in the flames. And it was not a general persuasion among them, that martyrs feel no pain in death. That these have feeling, as well as other men, plainly appeared, in the case

case of bishop *Ridley*, crying out, “I cannot burn, I cannot burn,” when his lower parts were consumed. Do you think the fear of shame, or the desire of praise, was the motive on which these acted? Or have you reason to believe it was mere obstinacy that hindred them from accepting deliverance? Sir, since *human nature has always been the same, so that our experience of what now passes in our own soul, will be the best comment on what is delivered to us concerning others*, let me intreat you, to make the case your own. You must not say, “I am not one of the ignorant vulgar: I am a man of sense and learning.” So were many of them; not inferior even to you, either in natural or acquired endowments. I ask then, Would any of these motives suffice, to induce *you* to burn at a stake? I beseech you, lay your hand on your heart, and answer between God and your own soul, What

What motive could incite *you* to walk into a fire, but an hope full of immortality? When you mention this motive, you speak to the point. And yet even with regard to this, both you and I should find, did it come to a trial, that the hope of a fool, or the hope of an hypocrite, would stand us in no stead. We should find nothing else would sustain us in that hour, but a well-grounded confidence of a better resurrection: nothing less than the " stedfastly looking up to heaven, and beholding the glory which shall be revealed."

8. " But hereticks, you say, have been martyrs." I will answer more particularly, when you specify Who? and When? It may suffice to say now, whosoever he be, that, rather than he will offend God, calmly and deliberately chuses to suffer death, I cannot lightly speak evil of him.

But

But *Cyprian* says, “ Some who had suffered tortures for Christ, yet afterward fell into gross, open sin.” It may be so; but it is nothing to the question. It does not prove in the least, what you brought it to prove, namely, “ That bad men have indured martyrdom.” Don’t evade, Sir, and say, “ Yes, torments are a kind of martyrdom.” True; but not the martyrdom of which we speak.

9. You salve all at last by declaring gravely, “ *It is not my design to detract in any manner from the just praise of those primitive martyrs, who sustained the cause of Christ, at the expence of their lives.* No. Who could ever suppose it was? Who could imagine, it was your design, to detract from the *just praise* of *Justin, Irenaeus, or Cyprian?* You only designed, to shew, what their *just praise*

was, namely, the praise of pick-pockets, of common cheats and impostors. We understand your meaning therefore, when you add, ^p *It is reasonable to believe, that they were the best sort of Christians, and the chief ornaments of the church in their several ages.*

10. You conclude, *My view is to shew, that their martyrdom does not add any weight to their testimony.* Whether it does or no, ^q *It gives the strongest proof (as you yourself affirm) of the sincerity of their faith: and consequently proves, That no suspicion of fraud can reasonably be entertained against them.* But this (which you seem to have quite forgot) was the whole of the objection: and consequently this as well as both the former objections, remain in their full force.

11. It has been objected, fourthly, you say, *That you destroy the faith and credit of all history.* But this

^p p. 213.

^q *ibid.*

^r p. 114.

objection,

objection, you affirm, *when seriously considered, will appear to have no sense at all in it.*

That we will try. And one passage, home to the point, is as good as a thousand. Now, Sir, be pleased to look back. In your *Preface*, page the ninth, I read these words: *The credibility of facts lies open to the trial of our reason and senses. But the credibility of witnesses depends on a variety of principles wholly concealed from us. And though, in many cases, it may reasonably be presumed, yet in none can it certainly be known.*

If this be as you assert (I repeat it again) then farewell the credit of all history. Sir, this is not *the cant of zealots*: you must not escape so: it is plain, sober reason. If *the credibility of witnesses* (of all witnesses; for you make no distinction) depends, as you peremptorily affirm, on a va-

riety of principles wholly conceded from us, and consequently, though it may be presumed in many cases, yet can be certainly known in none: then it is plain all history, sacred or profane, is utterly precarious and uncertain. Then I may indeed presume, but I cannot certainly know, that *Julius Cæsar* was killed in the senate-house: then I cannot certainly know, that there was an emperor in *Germany*, called *Charles* the fifth: that *Leo* the tenth ever sat in the see of *Rome*, or *Lewis* the fourteenth on the throne of *France*. Now let any man of common understanding judge, whether this objection have any sense in it, or no.

12. Under this same head, you fall again upon the case of witchcraft, and say, 'There is not in all history, any one miraculous fact, so authentically attested as the existence of witches. All

Christian (yea, and all heathen) nations whatsoever, have consented in the belief of them. Now to deny the reality of facts so solemnly attested, and so universally believed, seems to give the lie to the sense and experience of all christendom: to the wisest and best of every nation, and to publick monuments subsisting to our own times.

What obliges you then to deny it? You answer, ** The incredibility of the thing.* O Sir, never strain at the incredibility of this, after you have swallowed an hundred people talking without tongues.

13. What you aim at in this also is plain, as well as in your account of the *Abbé de Paris*: the point of your argument is, “ If you cannot believe these, then you ought not to believe the Bible: *The incredibility of the things related, ought to over-rule all testimony whatsoever.*”

^{*} p. 223.

N

Your

Your argument, at length, would run thus:

“ If things be incredible in themselves, then this incredibility ought to over-rule all testimony concerning them.

But the gospel-miracles are incredible in themselves.” Sir, that proposition I deny. You have not proved it yet. You have only now and then, as it were by the by, made any attempt to prove it. And till this is done, you have done nothing, with all the pother that you have made.

14. You reserve the home stroke for the last. *“ There is hardly a miracle said to be wrought in the primitive times, but what is said to be performed in our days. But all these modern pretensions, we ascribe to their true cause, the craft of a few, playing upon the credulity of the many, for*

private interest. When therefore we read of the same things done by the antients, and for the same ends, of acquiring wealth, credit, or power: how can we possibly hesitate to impute them to the same cause of fraud and imposture?

The reason of our hesitation is this. They did not answer *the same ends*. The modern clergy of *Rome* do acquire credit and wealth, by their pretended miracles. But the antient clergy acquired nothing by their miracles, but to be *afflicted, destitute, tormented*. The one gain all things thereby; the others lost all things. And this, we think, makes some difference. "Even unto this present hour, says one of them (writing to those who could easily confute him, if he spoke not the truth) we both hunger and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain

["] 1 Cor. iv. 11—13.

dwelling place — Being reviled, we bless ; being persecuted, we suffer it ; being defamed, we intreat. We are become as the filth of the world, as the off-scouring of all things unto this day. Now, Sir, whatever be thought of the others, we apprehend such clergy as these, labouring *thus*, unto the death, for *such* credit and wealth, are not chargeable with fraud and imposture.

VI. I have now finished what I had to say with regard to your book. Yet I think humanity requires me to add a few words, concerning some points frequently touched upon therein, which perhaps you do not so clearly understand.

We have been long disputing about *Christians*, about *Christianity*, and the *evidence* whereby it is supported. But what do those terms mean ? Who is a Christian indeed ? What is real, genuine Christianity ? And what is the surest and most accessible evidence (if

(if I may so speak) whereby I may know, that it is of God? May the God of the Christians enable me to speak on these heads, in a manner suitable to the importance of them!

Sect. I. 1. I would consider, first, Who is a Christian indeed? What does that term properly imply? It has been so long abused, I fear, not only to mean nothing at all, but, what was far worse than nothing, to be a cloak for the vilest hypocrisy, for the grossest abominations and immorali-
ties of every kind, that 'tis high time to rescue it out of the hands of wretches that are a reproach to hu-
man nature: to shew determinately, what manner of man he is, to whom this name of right belongs.

2. A *Christian* cannot think of the author of his being, without abasing himself before him: without a deep sense of the distance between a worm of earth, and him that sitteth on the

circle of the heavens. In his presence he sinks into the dust, knowing himself to be less than nothing in his eye : and being conscious, in a manner words cannot express, of his own littleness, ignorance, foolishness. So that he can only cry out, from the fulness of his heart, " O God ! What is man ! What am I ! "

3. He has a continual sense of his dependence on the parent of good, for his being and all the blessings that attend it. To him he refers every natural, and every moral endowment : with all that is commonly ascribed either to fortune, or to the wisdom, courage, or merit of the possessor. And hence he acquiesces in whatsoever appears to be his will, not only with patience, but with thankfulness. He willingly resigns all he is, all he has, to his wise and gracious disposal. The ruling temper of his heart, is the most absolute submission, and the tenderest

tenderest gratitude to his sovereign benefactor. And this grateful love creates filial fear: an awful reverence toward him, and an earnest care not to give place to any disposition, not to admit an action, word or thought, which might in any degree displease that indulgent power, to whom he owes his life, breath, and all things.

4. And as he has the strongest affection for the fountain of all good, so he has the firmest confidence in him: a confidence which neither pleasure nor pain, neither life nor death can shake. But yet this, far from creating sloth or indolence, pushes him on to the most vigorous industry. It causes him to put forth all his strength, in obeying him in whom he confides. So that he is never faint in his mind, never weary of doing whatever he believes to be his will. And as he knows, the most acceptable worship of God, is to imi-

tate him he worships, so he is continually labouring to transcribe into himself, all his imitable perfections: in particular, his justice, mercy, and truth, so eminently display'd in all his creatures.

5. Above all, remembering that God is love, he is conformed to the same likeness. He is full of love to his neighbour; of universal love; not confined to one sect or party; not restrained to those who agree with him in opinions, or in outward modes of worship; or to those who are allied to him by blood, or recommended by nearness of place. Neither does he love those only that love him, or that are indeared to him by intimacy of acquaintance. But his love resembles that of him, whose mercy is over all his works. It soars above all these scanty bounds; embracing neighbours and strangers, friends and enemies: yea, not only the

the good and gentle, but also the froward ; the evil and unthankful. For he loves every soul that God has made ; every child of man, of whatever place or nation. And yet this universal benevolence does in no wise interfere with a peculiar regard for his relations, friends, and benefactors : a fervent love for his country ; and the most indear'd affection to all men of integrity, of clear and generous virtue.

6. His love, as to these, so to all mankind, is itself generous and disinterested ; springing from no view of advantage to himself, from no regard to profit or praise ; no, nor even to the pleasure of loving. This is the daughter, not the parent of his affection. By experience he knows, that *social love* (if it mean the love of our neighbour) is absolutely, essentially different from *self-love*, even of the most allowable kind. Just as

dif-

different as the objects at which they point. And yet it is sure, that, if they are under due regulations, each will give additional force to the other, till they mix together never to be divided.

7. And this universal, disinterested love, is productive of all right affections. It is fruitful of gentleness, tenderness, sweetness; of humanity, courtesy, and affability. It makes a Christian rejoice in the virtues of all, and bear a part in their happiness; at the same time that he sympathizes with their pains, and compassionates their infirmities. It creates modesty, condescension, prudence, together with calmness and evenness of temper. It is the parent of generosity, openness, and frankness, void of jealousy and suspicion. It begets candor and willingness to believe and hope whatever is kind and friendly of every man: And invincible patience, never

ver overcome of evil, but overcoming evil with good.

8. The same love constrains him to converse, not only with a strict regard to truth, but with artless sincerity and genuine simplicity, as one in whom there is no guile. And not content with abstaining from all such expressions as are contrary to justice or truth, he endeavours to refrain from every unloving word, either to a present or of an absent person : In all his conversation aiming at this, either to improve himself in knowledge or virtue, or to make those with whom he converses some way wiser, or better, or happier than they were before.

9. The same love is productive of all right actions. It leads him into an earnest and steady discharge of all social offices, of whatever is due to relations of every kind ; to his friends, to his country, and to

any particular community whereof he is a member. It prevents his willingly hurting or grieving any man. It guides into an uniform practice of justice and mercy, equally extensive with the principle whence it flows. It constrains him to do all possible good, of every possible kind, to all men: and makes him invariably resolv'd, in every circumstance of life, to do that, and that only, to others, which, supposing he were himself in the same situation, he would desire they should do to him.

10. And as he is easy to others, so he is easy in himself. He is free from the painful swellings of pride, from the flames of anger, from the impetuous gusts of irregular self-will. He is no longer tortured with envy or malice, or with unreasonable and hurtful desire. He is no more enslaved to the pleasures of sense, but has the full power both over his mind and

and body, in a continued cheerful course of sobriety, of temperance and chastity. He knows how to use all things in their place, and yet is superior to them all. He stands above those low pleasures of imagination, which captivate vulgar minds, whether arising from what mortals term greatness, or from novelty, or beauty. All these too he can taste, and still look upward; still aspire to nobler enjoyments. Neither is he a slave to fame: Popular breath affects not him; he stands steddy, and collected in himself.

ii. And he who seeks no praise, cannot fear dispraise. Censure gives him no uneasiness; being conscious to himself, that he would not willingly offend, and that he has the approbation of the Lord of all. He cannot fear want; knowing in whose hand is the earth and the fulness thereof, and that it is impossible for him

to with-hold from one that fears him any manner of thing that is good. He cannot fear pain, knowing it will never be sent, unless it be for his real advantage ; and that then his strength will be proportion'd to it, as it has always been in times past. He cannot fear death ; being able to trust him he loves with his soul as well as his body ; yea glad to leave the corruptible body in the dust, till it is raised incorruptible and immortal. So that in honour or shame, in abundance or want, in ease or pain, in life or in death, always and in all things he has learned to be content, to be easy, thankful, joyful, happy.

12. He is happy in knowing there is a God, an intelligent cause and Lord of all, and that he is not the produce either of blind chance or inexorable necessity. He is happy in the full assurance he has, that this creator and end of all things, is a being

being of boundless wisdom, of infinite power to execute all the designs of his wisdom, and of no less infinite goodness, to direct all his power to the advantage of all his creatures. Nay even the consideration of his immutable justice, rendering to all their due, of his unspotted holiness, of his all-sufficiency in himself, and of that immense ocean of all perfections, which center in God from eternity to eternity, is a continual addition to the happiness of a Christian.

13. A farther addition is made thereto, while, in contemplating even the things that surround him, that thought strikes warmly upon his heart,

“ These are thy glorious works,
Parent of good : ”

While he takes knowledge of the invisible things of God, even his eternal power and wisdom, in the things

things that are seen, the heavens, the earth, the fowls of the air, the lilies of the field. How much more, while, rejoicing in the constant care which he still takes of the work of his own hand, he breaks out, in a transport of love and praise, “ O Lord, our governour! How excellent is thy name in all the earth! Thou that hast set thy glory above the heavens!” While he, as it were, sees the Lord sitting upon his throne, and ruling all things well : while he observes the general providence of God, co-extended with his whole creation, and surveys all the effects of it in the heavens and earth, as a well-pleas’d spectator ; while he sees the wisdom and goodness of his general government, descending to every particular ; so presiding over the whole universe, as over a single person ; so watching over every single person, as if he were the whole universe : How does he exult, when he reviews the various

various traces of the almighty goodness, in what has befallen himself, in the several circumstances and changes of his own life ! All which, he now sees, have been allotted to him and dealt out, in number, weight, and measure. With what triumph of soul, in surveying either the general or particular providence of God, does he observe every line pointing out an hereafter, every scene opening into eternity !

14. He is peculiarly and inexpressibly happy, in the clearest and fullest conviction, " This all-powerfull, all-wise, all-gracious being, this governour of all loves *me*. This lover of my soul is always with me, is never absent, no not for a moment. And I love him ; there is none in heaven but thee, none on earth that I desire beside thee ! And he has given me to resemble himself, he has stamp'd his image on my heart. And I live

O

unto

unto him ; I do only his will, I glorify him with my body and my spirit. And it will not be long before I shall die unto him ; I shall die into the arms of God. And then farewell sin and pain ; then it only remains, that I should live with him for ever."

15. This is the plain, naked portraiture of a Christian ; be not prejudiced against him for his name. Forgive his particularities of opinion, and (what you think) superstitious modes of worship. These are circumstances but of small concern ; and do not enter into the essence of his character. Cover them with a veil of love, and look at the substance ; his tempers, his holiness, his happiness.

Can calm reason conceive either a more amiable or a more desirable character ?

Is it your own? Away with names! Away with opinions! I care not what you are call'd. I ask not (it does not deserve a thought) what opinion you are of; so you are conscious to yourself, that you are the man, whom I have been (however faintly) describing.

Do not you know, you ought to be such? Is the governour of the world well pleased that you are not?

Do you (at least) desire it? I would to God that desire may penetrate your inmost soul; and that you may have no rest in your spirit, till you are not only almost, but altogether a Christian!

Sect. II. 1. The second point to be considered is, what is real, genuine Christianity? Whether we speak of it as a principle in the soul, or as a scheme or system of doctrine.

Christianity, taken in the latter sense, is, that system of doctrine, which describes the character above recited, which promises, It shall be mine, (provided I will not rest till I attain,) and which tells me, how I may attain it.

2. First, it *describes* this character in all its parts, and that in the most lively and affecting manner. The main lines of this picture are beautifully drawn, in many passages of the Old Testament. These are filled up in the New, retouch'd and finish'd, with all the art of God.

The same we have in miniature more than once: particularly in the thirteenth chapter of the former epistle to the *Corinthians*, and in that discourse which St. *Matthew* records, as delivered by our Lord, at his entrance upon his publick ministry.

3. Secondly, Christianity *promises*, this character shall be mine, if I will not

not rest till I attain it. This is promised both in the Old Testament and the New. Indeed the New is, in effect, all a promise: seeing every description of the servants of God mention'd therein, has the nature of a command; in consequence of those general injunctions, ^a *Be ye followers of me, as I am of Christ:* ^b *Be ye followers of them, who through faith and patience inherit the promises.* And every command has the force of a promise; in virtue of those general promises; ^c *A new heart will I give you, and I will put my Spirit within you; and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments and do them.* ^d *This is the covenant that I will make after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their minds and write them in their hearts.* Accordingly, when it is said, ^e *Thou shalt love the*

^a *1 Cor. xi. 1.* ^b *Heb. vi. 12.* ^c *Ezek. xxxvi. 26, 27.* ^d *Heb. viii. 10.* ^e *Matt. xxii. 37.*

Lord thy God, with all thy heart, and with all thy soul and with all thy mind; it is not only a direction, what I shall do ; but a promise of what God will do in me : Exactly equivalent with what is written elsewhere, *The Lord thy God will circumcise thy heart and the heart of thy seed* (alluding to the custom then in use) *to love the Lord thy God with all thine heart and with all thy soul.*

4. This being observ'd, it will readily appear to every serious person, who reads the New Testament with that care, which the importance of the subject demands. That every particular branch of the preceding character, is manifestly promised therein : Either explicitly, under the very form of a promise, or virtually, under that of a description or command.

5. *Deut. xxx. 6.*

5. Chri-

5. Christianity tells me, in the third place, how I may attain the promise, namely, by faith.

But what is faith? Not an opinion, no more than it is a form of words: not any number of opinions put together, be they ever so true. A string of opinions is no more Christian faith, than a string of beads is Christian holiness.

It is not an assent to any opinion, or any number of opinions. A man may assent to three, or three and twenty creeds: he may assent to all the Old and New Testament (at least, as far he understands them) and yet have no Christian faith at all.

6. The faith by which the promise is attained, is represented by Christianity, as a power wrought by the Almighty in an immortal spirit, inhabiting an house of clay, to see through that veil into the world of

spirits, into things invisible and eternal: a power to discern those things, which with eyes of flesh and blood no man hath seen or can see: either by reason of their nature, which (though they surround us on every side) is not perceptible by these gross senses: or by reason of their distance, as being yet afar off, in the bosom of eternity.

7. This is Christian faith in the general notion of it. In its more particular notion it is, a divine evidence or conviction wrought in my heart, that God is reconciled to *me* through his son: inseparably joined with a confidence in him, as a gracious, reconciled father, as for all things so especially for all those good things which are invisible and eternal.

To believe (in the Christian sense) is then, to walk in the light of eternity: and to have a clear sight of and confidence in the most high, reconciled

ciled to me, through the son of his love.

8. Now how highly desirable is such a faith, were it only on its own account? For how little does the wisest of men know, of any thing more than he can see with his eyes? What clouds and darkness cover the whole scene of things invisible and eternal? What does he know even of himself, as to his invisible part? What, of his future manner of existence? How melancholy an account does the prying, learned philosopher, (perhaps the wisest and best of all Heathens) the great, the venerable *Marcus Antoninus* give of these things? What was the result of all his serious researches? Of his high and deep contemplations? “Either dissipation (of the soul as well as the body, into the common, unthinking mass) or re-absorption into the universal fire, the un-intelligent source of

of all things : or, some unknown manner of conscious existence, after the body sinks to rise no more." One of these three he supposed must succeed death ; but which he had no light to determine. Poor *Antoninus* ! With all his wealth, his honour, his power ! With all his wisdom and philosophy !

" What points of knowledge did he gain ?
That life is sacred all—and vain !
Sacred how high ? And vain how low ?
He could not tell—But died to know."

9. He died to know ! And so must you : unless you are now a partaker of Christian faith. O consider this. Nay, and consider, not only how little you know of the immensity of the things that are beyond sense and time, but how uncertainly do you know even that little ? How faintly glimmering a light is that you have ? Can you properly be said, to *know* any of these things ? Is that knowledge any more than bare conjecture ?

And

And the reason is plain. You have no senses suited to invisible or eternal objects. What desiderata then, especially to the rational, the reflecting part of mankind are these? A more extensive knowledge of things invisible and eternal: a greater certainty in whatever knowledge of them we have: and, in order to both, faculties capable of discerning things invisible.

10. Is it not so? Let impartial reason speak. Does not every thinking man want a window, not so much in his neighbour's, as in his own breast? He wants an opening there, of whatever kind, that might let in light from eternity. He is pained to be thus feeling after God, so darkly, so uncertainly: to know so little of God, and indeed so little of any beside material objects. He is concerned, that he must see even that little, not directly, but in the dim,

dim, fullied glass of sense: and consequently so imperfectly and obscurely, that 'tis all a mere ænigma still.

11. Now these very desiderata faith supplies. It gives a more extensive knowledge of things invisible, shewing what eye had not seen, nor ear heard, neither could it before enter into our heart to conceive. And all these it shews in the clearest light, with the fullest certainty and evidence. For it does not leave us to receive our notices of them, by mere reflection from the dull glass of sense: but resolves a thousand ænigmas of the highest concern by giving faculties suited to things invisible. O who would not wish for such a faith, were it only on these accounts? How much more, if by this I may receive the promise, I may attain all that holiness and happiness?

12. So Christianity tells me: and and so I find it, may every real Christian

Christian say. I now am assured, that these things are so: I experience them in my own breast. What Christianity (considered as a doctrine) promised, is accomplished in my soul. And Christianity, considered, as an inward principle is the completion of all those promises. It is holiness and happiness; the image of God imprest on a created spirit: a fountain of peace and love springing up into everlasting life.

Sect. III. 1. And this I conceive to be the strongest evidence of the truth of Christianity. I do not undervalue traditional evidence. Let it have its place and its due honour. It is highly serviceable in its kind, and in its degree. And yet I cannot set it on a level with this.

It is generally supposed, that traditional evidence, is weakened by length of time; as it must necessarily pass through so many hands, in

a continued succession of ages. But no length of time can possibly affect the strength of this internal evidence. It is equally strong, equally new, through the course of seventeen hundred years. It passes now, even as it has done from the beginning, directly from God into the believing soul. Do you suppose time will ever dry up this stream? O no. It shall never be cut off.

Labitur & labetur in omne volubilis ævum.

2. Traditional evidence is of an extremely complicated nature, necessarily including so many and so various considerations, that only men of a strong and clear understanding can be sensible of its full force. On the contrary, how plain and simple is this? And how level to the lowest capacity? Is not this the sum? “One thing I know: I was blind; but now I see.” An argument so plain, that a peasant, a woman, a child may feel all its force.

3. The

3. The traditional evidence of Christianity stands as it were a great way off; and therefore although it speak loud and clear, yet makes a less lively impression. It gives us an account of what was transacted long ago, in far distant times as well as places. Whereas the inward evidence is intimately present to all persons, at all times and in all places. It is nigh thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart, if thou believest in the Lord Jesus Christ. *This then is the record, this is the evidence, emphatically so called, That God hath given unto us eternal life: and this life is in his son.*

4. If then it were possible (which I conceive it is not) to shake the traditional evidence of Christianity, still he that has the internal evidence (and every true believer hath the witness or evidence in himself) would stand firm and unshaken. Still he could

could say to those who were striking at the external evidence, “Beat on the sack of *Anaxagoras*.” But you can no more hurt *my* evidence of Christianity, than the tyrant could hurt the spirit of that wise man.

5. I have sometimes been almost inclined to believe, that the wisdom of God has, in most later ages, permitted the external evidence of Christianity to be more or less clogged and incumbered, for this very end, that men (of reflection especially) might not altogether rest there, but be constrained to look into themselves also, and attend to the light shining in their hearts.

Nay, it seems (if it may be allowed for us to pry so far into the reasons of the divine dispensations) that particularly in this age, God suffers all kind of objections to be raised against the traditional evidence of Christianity, that men of understanding, though

though unwilling to give it up, yet, at the same time they defend this evidence, may not rest the whole strength of their cause thereon, but seek a deeper and firmer support for it.

6. Without this, I cannot but doubt, whether they can long maintain their cause: whether, if they do not obey the loud call of God, and lay far more stress, than they have hitherto done, on this internal evidence of Christianity, they will not, one after another, give up the external, and (in heart at least) go over to those whom they are now contending with: so that in a century or two, the people of *England* will be fairly divided into real Deists and real Christians.

And I apprehend this would be no loss at all, but rather an advantage

to the Christian cause : nay, perhaps it would be the speediest, yea, the only effectual way, of bringing all reasonable Deists to be Christians.

7. May I be permitted to speak freely? May I, without offence, ask, of you that are called Christians, What real loss would you sustain, in giving up your present opinion, that the Christian system is of God? Though you bear the name, you are not Christians now: you have neither Christian faith nor love. You have no divine evidence of things unseen: you have not entered into the holiest by the blood of Jesus. You do not love God with all your heart: neither do you love your neighbour as yourself. You are neither happy nor holy. You have not learned in every state therewith to be content; to rejoice evermore, even in want, pain, death; and in every thing

thing to give thanks. You are not holy in heart; superior to pride, to anger, to foolish desires. Neither are you holy in life: you do not walk as Christ also walked. Does not the main of *your* Christianity lie in your opinion? decked with a few outward observances? For as to morality, even honest Heathen morality (O let me utter a melancholy truth) many of those whom you style Deists, there is reason to fear, have far more of it than you.

8. Go on, gentlemen, and prosper. Shame these nominal Christians out of that poor superstition which they call Christianity. Reason, rally, laugh them out of their dead, empty forms, void of spirit, of faith, of love. Convince them, that such unmeaning pageantry (for such it manifestly is, if there is nothing in the heart correspondent with the outward

shew) is absolutely unworthy, you need not say, of God, but even of any man that is endued with common understanding. Shew them, that while they are endeavouring to please God thus, they are only beating the air. Know your time: press on: push your victories, till you have conquered all that know not God. And then he, whom neither they nor you know now, shall arise and gird himself with strength, and go forth in his almighty love, and sweetly conquer you all together.

9. O that the time were come!
 How do I long for you to be partakers of the exceeding great and precious promise! How am I pained when I hear any of *you* using those silly terms, which the men of form have taught you, calling the mention of the only thing you want, *Cant!* the deepest wisdom, the highest

highest happiness, *Enthusiasm* ! What ignorance is this? How extremely despicable would it make you in the eyes of any but a Christian? But he cannot despise you, who loves you as his own soul, who is ready to lay down his life for your sake.

10. Perhaps you will say, "But this internal evidence of Christianity affects only those in whom the promise is fulfilled. It is no evidence to *me*." There is truth in this objection. It does affect them chiefly: but it does not affect them only. It cannot, in the nature of things, be so strong an evidence to others, as it is to them. And yet it may bring a degree of evidence, it may reflect some light on you also.

For, first, You see the beauty and loveliness of Christianity, when it

it is rightly understood. And you are sure, there is nothing to be desired, in comparison of it.

Secondly, You know the Scripture promises this, and says, It is attained by faith, and by no other way.

Thirdly, You see clearly, how desirable Christian faith is, even on account of its own intrinsic value.

Fourthly, You are a witness, that the holiness and happiness above described can be attained no other way. The more you have laboured after virtue and happiness, the more convinced you are of this. Thus far then you need not lean upon other men: thus far you have personal experience.

Fifthly,

Fifthly, what reasonable assurance can you have of things, whereof you have not personal experience? Suppose the question were, Can the blind be restored to sight? This you have not yourself experienced. How then will you know, that such a thing ever was? Can there be an easier or surer way, than to talk with one or some number of men who were blind, but are now restored to sight? They cannot be deceived as to the fact in question; the nature of the thing leaves no room for this. And if they are honest men (which you may learn from other circumstances) they will not deceive you.

Now transfer this to the case before us; and those who were blind, but now see, those who were sick many years, but now are heal'd, those who were miserable but now are happy,

happy, will afford *you* also, a very strong evidence of the truth of Christianity ; as strong as can be in the nature of things, till you experience it in your own soul. And this, though it be allow'd they are but plain men, and, in general, of weak understanding ; nay, though some of them should be mistaken in other points, and hold opinions which cannot be defended.

11. All this may be allow'd concerning the primitive fathers : I mean particularly *Clemens Romanus, Ignatius, Polycarp, Justin Martyr, Irenæus, Origen, Clemens Alexandrinus, Cyprian* ; to whom I would add *Macarius and Ephraim Syrus*.

I allow, that some of these had not strong natural sense ; that few of them had much learning ; and none,

more, the assistances which our age enjoys, in some respects above all that went before.

Hence I doubt not but whoever will be at the pains of reading over their writings for that poor end, will find many mistakes, many weak suppositions, and many ill-drawn conclusions.

12. And yet I exceedingly reverence them as well as their writings, and esteem them very highly in love. I reverence them, because they were Christians, such Christians as are above described. And I reverence their writings, because they describe true genuine Christianity: and direct us to the strongest evidence of the Christian doctrine.

Indeed in addressing the heathens of those times, they intermix other

Q

argu-

arguments ; particularly, that drawn from the numerous miracles, which were then perform'd in the church : which they needed only to open their eyes and see daily wrought in the face of the sun.

But still they never relinquish this : " What the Scripture promises, I enjoy. Come and see what Christianity has done here. And acknowledge, it is of God."

13. I reverence these antient Christians (with all their failings) the more, because I see so few Christians now ; because I read so little in the writings of later times, and hear so little of genuine Christianity : and because most of the modern Christians (so call'd) not content with being wholly ignorant of it, are deeply prejudiced against it, calling it Enthusiasm, and I know not what.

That

That the God of power and love
may make both them and you and
me such Christians as those fathers
were, is the earnest prayer of,

Reverend Sir,

Your real Friend

January 24. 1748-9.

and Servant.



[122]



British Museum

British Museum

British Museum